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A LUCKY YOUNG WOMAN

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A LUCKY YOUNG WOMAN

BY

F. C. PHILIPS

AUTHOR OF

"AS IN A LOOKING GLASS" ETC.

SECOND IMPRESSION

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TO

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RECORDER OF CARDIFF

IN RECOLLECTION OF MANY

PLEASANT DAYS ON THE

SOUTH WALES

CIRCUIT

A LUCKY YOUNG WOMAN

CHAPTER I

Sir Hugo Conyers, the sixth baronet, ought to have been a very rich man. He ought to have been—so he would tell you at Boodle's, as he sat in the window to put himself *en évidence* for the afternoon, before making his way to some cheap restaurant for his dinner—worth at least fifty thousand a year. The Conyers estates were in North Wales, and would no doubt have brought in Sir Hugo the amount he named had they been unencumbered. But Sir Hugo's father had been extravagant before him.

I need not tell the old story of cards and racing and heavy betting. When Sir Hugo succeeded to the title every acre that could be sold had gone, and he himself had joined with his father in so heavily encumbering what remained, that his income consisted of some few hundreds a year, which were paid him quarterly by the trustees of his mother's marriage settlement, and which he could not possibly anticipate or get into his hands in any way. No solicitor in London would advance him a farthing upon the security of a property mortgaged up to the hilt, and within two years after he succeeded his father the mortgagees foreclosed, and Conyers Castle passed into the hands of a rich ironmaster and quarry-owner.

There remained for Sir Hugo the modest income I have already mentioned. Upon this he somehow just contrived to exist. He was at the time this story commences some fifty-five years of age, and had been a widower for ten years. The chief remaining trouble of his life—for he had grown callous, and some men who knew him went so far as to say shameless, about things that usually trouble or ought to trouble a gentleman if he have them, such as his tradesmen's accounts and his debts of honour—was his daughter Marcia, who was now nineteen.

In the first place, Sir Hugo did not care for his daughter in the least. She was an annoyance to him, and in an indolent, selfish kind of way he disliked her on that account. He would sometimes, indeed, as he drank his glass of spirits and water in his bedroom before retiring for the night, frame a more or less definite wish, which went rather beyond the mere expression of a regret, that she had ever been born. But apparently these paternal hopes were not likely to be realised. Marcia was, as an English girl of her age ought to be, the picture of health, and Sir Hugo used to finish his whisky and water and go to bed, thinking over what might have been if things had gone differently—a course of meditation in which men who have recklessly and wantonly thrown away their chances and wasted their lives are very apt to indulge, usually attributing the blame to their own bad luck, or to a shameful absence of any proper sense of duty on the part of their friends and relations.

Marcia's mother when she became Lady Conyers had immense expectations. Her father was one of those great monied men who have become more and more a power in the state since we were wicked enough to repeal the Corn Laws, and to do other things equally calculated to destroy our old titled and landed families.

When Mr. Sandarson's daughter married Sir Hugo he paid his son-in-law's debts without any inquiry further than as to their amount, and he also was liberal as a rich father-in-law ought to be in the way of an annual allowance; but with all the instincts of a man of business, he refused to make any settlement upon his daughter, contenting himself with the remark that his name was sufficiently well known in the City; that when he promised to pay so much a year he could pay it, and that when he died he should not forget his only daughter. As for his capital, he said he wanted it in his business, where it could make fifteen per cent. safely instead of being tied up at three and a half.

This was frank enough, and Sir Hugo was more than contented at the time with the three thousand a year which her father's solicitors transmitted punctually to Lady Conyers, and with the certain prospect, as every one then supposed, that the old gentleman would die worth a sum so large that even Sir Hugo himself began to wonder at the possibilities of enjoyment that would be opened to him when his wife should succeed to her share of it. Meantime he reflected he could always get a little extra ready money out of his father-in-law at a pinch. The pinches were frequent, and the old man, to do him justice, did not grumble at them more than was necessary and reasonable, especially when his daughter acted as mediator and peacemaker.

Commercial fortunes, however, are even more uncertain than are landed estates, and bankruptcy may come upon the one as suddenly and to the outer world as unexpectedly as a suit for foreclosure upon the other. The City one morning was struck with something like panic to hear that the great house of Sandarson had suspended payment, involving with it in its fall—so the rumour went—one or two large houses as well, and possibly even the bank which had been honoured with its account.

The rumour was correct except as regarded the bank, which had for some time past looked suspiciously at the paper of Sandarson and Company, and had at last flatly refused to discount that commodity at all without a margin so considerable that the refusal amounted virtually to a direct denial of what is known as ordinary mercantile credit.

Mr. Sandarson himself must have foreseen the crash for some time, and he did not survive it many months. Kindly people said he died of a broken heart. Those who suffered by his fall were less charitable, and declared that for years he had known what was coming, and instead of facing his difficulties, had to brace himself up from day to day with champagne and ultimately with brandy.

It matters little what people say of a man after he has failed in business, and nothing what they say of him when he is dead. Mr. Sandarson died before the full extent of his liabilities was known.

There was great sympathy felt for Sir Hugo in the sacred precincts of Boodle's. Men of the fashionable world know, as a rule, that their most intimate friends are selfish and heartless. Very few if any of the members of Boodle's had the slightest regard or even respect for Sir Hugh Conyers, but the heartlessness of his father-in-law, in having the presumption to fail for a sum of which even a small slice would have made most of them happy, wounded their moral susceptibilities very painfully.

"A man in business," profoundly observed an old gentleman, who, having spent his wife's fortune and his own, was now just able to keep his name on the books of the Club and pay his Club accounts and debts of honour by directing and promoting Joint Stock Companies, "a man of business has no business to fail. I consider Sandarson far worse than a defaulter. A horse may break its leg, or you may have a run of luck against you at

bridge—even with the best play—but for a business man to fail is inexcusable. It shows that he does not understand what ought to be an absolute certainty.''

In this opinion the bulk of the company seemed to concur. Some of them, indeed, openly avowed a strong opinion that Sir Hugo had been robbed by his father-in-law, while those who best knew the baronet himself discussed the interesting question how he would take it.

Sir Hugo took it as might have been expected from a gentleman with his wide knowledge of the world and peculiarly philosophic temperament. He became so careful over bridge and écarté, and so successful when he took the trouble to form an opinion on the merits of a horse, that many of his old friends began to fight shy of him. The limits of even the oldest friendship are apt to become strained when the luck invariably falls to Damon and not to Pythias. And then, too, men who gamble even within their means are apt to be unreasonable; and to say nasty things of those to whom they habitually lose. So although Sir Hugo kept his name on the books of Boodle's, he gave up frequenting the card-room of that establishment, and contented himself with the bow window in the afternoon, where he would sit pretending to read the paper until his dinner hour, when he would descend the steps with an air so self-possessed that the oldest loungers in Clubland could hardly have made a guess at his destination and its object.

All these things make a man bitter in proportion to his selfishness. It galled Hugo Conyers to move about like one of Homer's ghosts in the world to which he had once belonged and to be denied its pleasures. To him the delights of Clubland were real and tangible—among the few things worth living for. He had just that amount of good taste which thoroughly selfish men about town acquire. He liked Boodle's because it was old and select. He could appreciate its cookery and the vintages in

its wine list. The butler respected his opinion and the *chef* valued his commendation. And Mr. Gainer himself would have allowed him much of that latitude which prevailed in the old days of the "account per contra at Brooks'," rather than see his name disappear from the list of members.

We need only add what the reader will probably have guessed for himself, that from the time of Mr. Sandarson's failure Sir Hugo persistently ill-treated his wife. When a British workman is out of employment, and cannot enjoy his usual allowance of beer and tobacco, he is apt to be indignant with his wife because she cannot set forth the dinner-table in its accustomed manner, and to evince his displeasure in a practical form by beating her. Sir Hugo Conyers could not beat his wife, but studied neglect and bitter words can be made more cruel than any blows; and of these Lady Conyers had more than even those who knew her husband and his disposition most thoroughly could ever have guessed. She lingered on for several years as only a woman can. She had hard work in their little house in Sloane Street to make both ends meet, and to keep her husband from open outbreaks of temper, but she toiled bravely. While Sir Hugo was at Boodle's, or in the Park, or looking in at Tattersall's, she would occupy herself with that domestic drudgery which is often an anodyne to women.

They kept but one maid in these days of famine, so Lady Conyers herself did much of the work of the house; and there was always her child, little Marcia. Marcia and her mother dined at one, and if the little girl had acquitted herself creditably in the morning over her spelling, she would be allowed to go out with her mother in the afternoon and look at the shops, or walk in the park.

Marcia's life was happy enough, for she was too young to understand or even guess at the things that had happened. She used to like to walk out with her mother or

to sit with her at home. Poor Lady Conyers, who was devoted to the child, used to play the piano to her, and show her how to dress and undress her favourite doll, and to read stories to her and tell her fairy tales.

An only child will usually either turn out very well or very ill, and the happiest children are those who have brothers and sisters. Marcia showed signs of turning out well. She was obedient, docile, quick-witted, and extremely affectionate. It is impossible to expect more from a child of seven. It is very seldom that you get as much.

When they told her that her mother had gone away and was an angel in Heaven—this was told her by the hospital nurse and by the servant, Heaven not lying within the range of Sir Hugo's ideas—she had no more than a child's notion of what had really happened, and of all that she had lost. She suffered as children of her age do suffer when they lose a mother who has brought them up herself, and she for a long time refused comfort.

The daily governess, who was engaged until, as Sir Hugo feelingly remarked, things had got into shape, did something to brighten the child's life. She was a German Fräulein of the pleasantest type—and the Germans are kindly to children, and show their kindness for them in a practical way that children appreciate. German nursery tales and German toys are marvels not to be approached in their kind, and for a little girl left in the world without mother, brothers and sisters, or even playfellows, a kind-hearted German governess comes as a Providence that is sorely needed.

Fräulein Dietz was a kindly, simple, busy, cheerful little body, and soon had entirely won Marcia's heart. She showed her pupil pictures of all kinds, and told her what they represented when the letterpress offered difficulties. She began to teach her the piano, and gave her some idea of how she would have to play it when her

hands were larger; and she also taught her to chatter fluently in German, and to pick her way through easy French lesson books.

I believe, indeed I am sure, that German governesses, like German professors, are the best of their kind. Teaching with them is not a means of livelihood so much as a pursuit which they thoroughly enjoy, and they make it their business to teach systematically and soundly. Nor do I agree with those who accuse them of faults of temper. On the contrary, I have always found the Teutonic temper to be fond of authority, but at the same time patient, gentle, and capable of great affection.

Marcia was a pupil whom, as a famous Head Master once observed, it paid you to teach. She was also a child whom it was difficult not to love, so that when the first storm of her grief had calmed her days passed brightly and pleasantly with the warm-hearted, motherly Fräulein. They were the happiest days she was to know for many years to come.

Sir Hugo, finding that Fräulein Dietz was able to manage his little daughter so admirably, came to the conclusion that it would be wise on his part to retain her services altogether. And although the salary he offered was by no means a tempting one, yet the Fräulein, having become devotedly attached to her little charge, was fain to accept it, and henceforward she resided altogether in the house.

The Fräulein and Marcia had many little pleasures of their own, and many little household matters upon their hands that made time glide by hour after hour and week after week almost unheeded. Upon the Fräulein, indeed, it seemed as if time could not possibly have any effect unless it might be to turn absolutely white hair that here and there already showed a silvery glint. She was the typical German woman, differing as much from all ordinary notions we entertain as to what

a German Fräulein who bids fair to become an old maid may resemble, as does any of our own healthy English girls who you may see any day where girls are to be found—in the Park, or on the Brighton Parade, or at Scarborough, or where you please—from the marvellous *Mees Anglaise* portrayed in *Charivari*. How Leech, who could draw an English girl as truly as Landseer could paint deer or hound, must have laughed as he turned over *Charivari* at his Club.

Fräulein Dietz was short, of course, and also stout, with blue eyes and light hair, genuinely Teuton. Profane critics, such as like the lean, colourless horrors painted by the late Sir Philip Burne-Jones, would have considered Miss Dietz, to use a plain English word, podgy. But there was a depth of honesty and affection in her blue eyes, and her heart was as simple as a child's and as tender as that of a mother. And qualities such as these will go far to counterbalance a carriage that is not altogether Parisian, and a Teutonic homeliness such as is sometimes supposed by people who know everything to indicate want of education, or, as it pleases them to call it, culture.

Such, to sketch her briefly, was Fräulein Dietz, Marcia's second mother and constant companion. And it must be added, that the Fräulein had many other most estimable virtues. She was cheerful, industrious, bright, full of life, extremely affectionate, and absolutely devoid of selfishness.

It was little wonder that Marcia should love Fräulein Dietz, and that when Sir Hugo thought it time that the governess should return to Germany or seek out some other engagement, Marcia should be able to point out that the Fräulein was, in fact, housekeeper rather than ex-governess, and that it would be a very false economy indeed to lose her services, even though she herself was now nineteen.

"You see, papa," urged Marcia, "the Fräulein has taught me as much as she can make me learn; but she will never teach me to manage a house, or to keep the servants in order, or to look after those tiresome little bills which run away with more money than the big ones. She has tried very hard to do so, I know; but she laughs at me, and declares it isn't in me. Why, papa, if the Fräulein went away the servants would do exactly as they pleased, the tradesmen would cheat me shamefully, and our bills would be terrible."

Sir Hugo saw the force of this, and ungraciously gave his consent to the Fräulein's remaining. Whereat, I grieve to say, for the credit of Marcia's veracity, that she and the Fräulein laughed very heartily in the evening over their little old-fashioned repast of tea, toast, and watercress.

On the other hand, Sir Hugo consoled himself with reflecting that the Fräulein's salary was small, that he need not trouble himself to pay it regularly, and that after all it was probably cheaper to let her stop. She cost little more than a servant, and no doubt Marcia was right in contending that she saved that little two or three times over; and with these calculations Sir Hugo consoled himself as he sat in his easy chair at Boodle's, remembering dimly and wistfully how he had always wished to live, and pondering gloomily upon the shabby way in which fortune had treated him.

"It is always so, sir," he said to himself. "It is only the snobs who have a chance in these days, even in the service; fellows who can live and dress themselves on a hundred a year." Which course of reflection led him to the conclusion that the country was going to the devil, and that he could not do better than fortify himself with a stiff glass of whisky and soda.

CHAPTER II

Sir Hugo was, as I have said, fifty-five years of age. He did not attempt to conceal this fact, as it stood on record in Burke and Debrett. You must not contradict things that are written in the book of Jasher, or when your back is turned, some young gentleman may despatch the smoking-room waiter for the awkward record and turn you into ridicule. So Sir Hugo never alluded to his age, but carried it pleasantly and, indeed, almost defiantly. And to do him justice, he was very well preserved.

Time does not tell upon men who are idle and self-indulgent, unless they also have a bad constitution or lead a vicious life. Now Sir Hugo's constitution was apparently excellent. His teeth were sound, and his digestion unimpaired. He walked erectly, and had never been troubled with gout even in its premonitory form of indigestion. He was constitutionally lazy. He had never cared much even when young for tramping the stubbles or keeping well in the first flight; but during the few years that he was in the Guards he used to be considered a smart officer, and he still retained the dignity of his old military bearing without its stiffness.

Sir Hugo could not afford a valet, but he did not need one; and as you saw him make his way along Piccadilly and down St. James's Street, you would think, not knowing at whom you were looking, what a fine, gallant, upright English gentleman he was.

And indeed a man can preserve himself wonderfully if he avoids vulgar vices, such as indulgence in early drinks, or in the still more fatal habit of eating more

than he requires; if he keeps regular hours; and if, to use a comprehensive phrase, he takes care of himself. Now Sir Hugo took care of himself without being aware that he did so, and consequently his years sat graciously on him. Above all, he never troubled himself with thinking—a bad habit, tending greatly to shorten our enjoyment of the little span of life which the fates allow us.

It has been maliciously said, probably by some ill-educated and ill-mannered nonconformist, that deans live to an immense age, because they have a certain income, nothing to do for it, and a thoroughly comfortable deanery in which to do that nothing in a manner that becomes the environment and is worthy of it.

Sir Hugo, had he gone into the Church instead of into the Guards, would certainly have become a dean. And it is almost equally certain that in these vexatious days of ours, he would have refused a bishopric. And herein he would have been wise. Indeed, I, for my own humble part, would far sooner be Dean of Westminster than Archbishop of York, or even Canterbury.

It is difficult to describe Marcia Conyers. She was tall and upright like her father, with a head such as the old masters loved to paint, well poised upon a neck worthy of its burden. Her features were Roman rather than Greek, and her thick soft hair was of that deep black which, as the light glints upon it, seems to take a bluish tinge. Her eyes were of a colour that is rare—a deep iron brown, like that (if the comparison may be permitted) of a thoroughly tempered gunbarrel, and as fearless and resolute as those of a hawk. Her gait was not that now considered fashionable, nor was it that which the drill-master sometimes contrives to impart to tall young ladies as a last boarding-school touch. Perhaps I may best describe her by saying that the more plainly she dressed, the more likely would she be to strike your

attention. She was, indeed, as Tennyson has it in his vision of fair women—

> "*A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,*
> *And most divinely fair.*"

It need only be added that she had admirably good taste and a faultless eye for colour, and that, as it can hardly be said she went into society, she dressed to please herself.

Now as Hugo Conyers was one day walking leisurely up Piccadilly, he saw on the other side of the way, under the blank wall of Devonshire House, two ladies going in the direction of Knightsbridge, who were in fact his own daughter and Fräulein Dietz. It may seem odd that a man should not recognise his own daughter on the other side of the street, but as a matter of fact, Sir Hugo did not at first recognise Marcia.

Being too well-bred a gentleman to stare at a lady, he might have passed on with some vague wishes that he was still young and could begin life again, had not Marcia stopped and looked at him across the road. An uneasy suspicion at once flashed through his mind that she might want half-a-sovereign for further purchases, so he waved his hand with an air of dignified affection that spoke volumes. "Do not trouble to cross the road, my sweet child," that wave said; "I require nothing. God bless you. I am proud of you. You amply repay many years of toil and anxiety and self-denial." It was the gesture of a man who, like Lord Beaconsfield's Duke in "Lothair," thanks Providence devoutly that his children are not unworthy of him.

But as he made his way down St. James's Street towards Boodle's, other ideas came crowding into his head; and when he reached that club, and had ensconced himself in a comfortable arm-chair, he began to think so very seriously that many of the men in the room inclined to

the opinion he must have lost money, while those who knew better favoured the idea that he had come into money, and was perhaps a little bewildered by it.

It was late enough in the year for a fire, and Sir Hugo sat before the fire and meditated. He also did what for him was an unusual thing; for when he had apparently finished his meditations he repaired to the coffee-room, where he very slowly and sedately, as becomes a gentleman of his age and position, recruited himself with a brown bread biscuit and two or three glasses of Madeira. Madeira was a wine he rarely touched, but on this occasion he felt a stimulant necessary, so he took his Madeira slowly, and, as it were medicinally. When it was finished he repaired to the writing-room, and there, after making a careful draft with alterations, copied and despatched the following letter:

"DEAR LADY ST. AUSTELL,

"I am going to presume upon our long friendship to ask a favour so slight that you need no more hesitate at its refusal than I at the suggestion.

"I know that at this time of the year your house is always full, but if you could make room for my daughter Marcia for a few days, I should be glad if you would let me send her.

"She has not lately been looking well. Of course she pretends that there is nothing the matter with her, but I believe the truth to be that the dear child fancies I prefer Town myself even at this time of year, and is unwilling to leave me.

"The air of Oakshire would, I am sure, brace her wonderfully. As she has never had a maid of her own she will, of course, not bring one with her, but will not encroach upon the time of yours.

"You will find her greatly grown. Indeed I sometimes fear she has a little outgrown her strength.

"About yourself, who have the gift of perpetual youth, I need hardly ask. And as I read in last Saturday's *Field* a full account of the day in your coverts, I know that St. Austell must be as vigorous and hearty as ever.

"For myself, the days of gun and saddle are gone; but age brings with it its own consolations and even its own enjoyments.

"Pray answer this letter as frankly as I hope I have written it. If you are full I shall take Marcia down to Brighton, which is now and long has been my country residence.

"Remember me most kindly to St. Austell, and believe me,

"Ever sincerely yours,

"HUGO CONYERS."

The composition of this letter took some little time, and when it was finished and despatched, Sir Hugo, with the proud feeling that he was a father who did his duty at any denial or sacrifice to himself, ordered a dinner which he felt he had thoroughly earned—half-a-dozen oysters, a little clear soup, a partridge, and some caviare on toast, and to this, with an imperial pint of champagne, he did ample justice.

He felt that he had done his duty to his daughter, and deserved a dinner a little out of the common as its reward. He did not read after dinner, for he took care of his eyes, as of all other things essential to his own comfort and enjoyment, but he sat over the table for some little time with a small cup of black coffee.

Sir Hugo was just about to leave the club, when a sudden thought occurred to him. He turned into the morning-room and took up the *Morning Post*.

There he read as follows:

"The Earl and Countess of St. Austell are entertaining a small circle of friends at St. Austell Towers, Oak-

shire, including the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador and the Countess Olmutski, the Duke and Duchess of Lincoln, the Earl of Norwich, the Earl and Countess of Deepdale, and the Ladies Gwendoline and Isabel Anstice, Sir Michael Govett, Sir George and Lady Heythorp and Miss Heythorp, Colonel Hewland, Royal Horse Guards, the Honourable and Reverend Sidney Winthrop, Mr. and the Honourable Mrs. Carpenter, Major Allardyce, Mr. Davidson, M.P., &c.''

"I could not possibly have done better," he said to himself, as he stood on the mat while the porter hailed a cab, a comfort to which Sir Hugo felt himself fully entitled after his day's work. "It looks almost like the finger of Providence."

The cabman on being paid his exact fare at the door in Sloane Street took a different view of Providence and its workings, in which two other cabmen, whom he met at the Cadogan Arms, where he assuaged his anger with rum and shrub, fully concurred.

"That's where it is in a club," observed one of these two philosophers. "If you're in the street and off the rank you can pick your man. Get called to a club and you never know what to expect. And what I say is this —the sweller the club the meaner the man. Ah! nine times out of ten."

Sir Hugo for once in a way was not discontented after his fashion or in his own heart with the ways of Providence, and went to bed with a misty sort of idea that to be a good parent is its own reward.

This took more definite shape as he fell asleep, thinking of Marcia's age, and of other things, all of which would have been pleasant enough were it not for the reflection that she would need one or two new dresses at least, and that she had no credit running with any West End milliner.

"After all," he thought, "the girl always looks at her best in her plainest dress. I think I ought to know. And as there are other girls there, they will act as a foil

to her. In plain muslin and blue ribbon, or cherry—yes, cherry for choice—I'd back her against most fields she is likely to meet.''

Excellent meditations such as these soon had their effect, and Sir Hugo fell into that peaceful sleep which ought always to follow a day that has been conscientiously devoted to hard work for a worthy object.

* * * * *

By the earliest possible post Sir Hugo received from Lady St. Austell the most gracious of answers. Lady St. Austell would be delighted if Marcia would come down at once, and stop as long as she pleased. Would not Sir Hugo come down too? Of course the men were all busy in the truly English pastime of killing something. Day after day it was either hunting or shooting, so that nothing was seen of them until dinner-time, after which they retired to the smoking-room and went religiously to sleep. But Sir Hugo could please himself, and might stop indoors all day, and give Lady St. Austell and her friends the pleasure of his society. If, on the other hand, he found the air of Oakshire to suit him, he could amuse himself as he pleased. There were horses that wanted both riding and driving, and the grounds, for the time of the year, were really in capital order. She need not add that her house was Liberty Hall, and that in all that he did or left undone he could conduct himself exactly as if he was in his own house.

Sir Hugo's reply did not take him long. He had many reasons for accepting the invitation, and none for refusing it. He felt that for himself a change would do him good, and would even be an economy, after all incidental expenses (including tips) had been reckoned up to a five-shilling piece; and in his own case there would be no tips to huntsmen, whips, or keepers—heavy items, as many a young man has had cause to know.

Sir Hugo sent one of his most courtly replies, and two days later was on his way with Marcia to St. Austell Towers.

The journey down, although as a rule he hated railway journeys, actually seemed to invigorate Sir Hugo. He talked cheerfully to Marcia about his own exploits in earlier days with the gun and across country, and he actually went so far as to declare that had he only a decent place of his own in the country, no power on earth should tempt him up to London, unless it were for something really important, such as to be present at Court on Marcia's presentation.

He became, indeed, so amiable that Marcia was almost bewildered, and marvelled whether she might have come across some "streak," as the Americans call it, in her father, the existence of which she had not as yet even suspected. And when they were met by an open carriage —for it was a bright sunny day—and were being whirled along the road by a pair of sturdy, fast-going horses, she almost forgot all first disagreeables in the exhilaration which fresh air, fair English scenery, rapid motion, and a clear sky will produce even in the most confirmed invalid, but which in the young is a something as indescribable as the effect of good champagne taken in reason and at the right time.

Everything was new to this London girl, who knew but little, indeed nothing, of our most beautiful English scenery, except from the Academy and from photographs.

Marcia would have clapped her hands with pleasure had she been alone at the mere sight of the hedgerows —always picturesque—and of the cattle, and the quaint cottages in the old village, and the little stream with a bridge that seemed almost an artificial ruin, it so invited the sketcher by its infinite variety of dilapidation and tint.

And then, as the gates were swung open, they entered

the park and dashed through an avenue such as England only can boast. On each side were the great elms; and under the oaks away in the turf the deer were busy among the fallen acorns, and the carriage wheels startled a great jay, all chocolate and lapis lazuli, who scuttered away with his own shriek of anger and noisy complaint at being disturbed.

Nor was this all, for a little stone bridge took them over the stream which fed the lake, where there were swans both black and white, and as many other kinds of water-fowl as even St. James's Park had ever shown her in her morning walks. And there was the home farm, with its little herd of cattle, and its goats, and a large enclosure for some kangaroos. And then they came to thick shrubberies carefully planted with evergreens, until the coachman checked his horses to an inch at the door of an English house such as it is a pleasure even to look at through a railway window.

For The Towers was an old red-brick Tudor mansion which might, before the time of heavy guns, have almost stood a siege. The moat round it had been drained, and its sides laid out as terraces, which in summer were bright with flowers. The windows had been fitted with modern sashes and plate glass, and in the centre of the quadrangle, which could easily have held two or three troops of horse, a fountain now leaped into the air, which in warm weather fell upon centenarian gold-fish basking among broad water-lily leaves, but now threw a crystal jet in the spray of which the bright sun painted a glorious rainbow.

Round all four sides of the court ran a genuine cloister, the roof of which formed a terrace and summer garden to the first floor. Over the gateway was the clock tower. Wolsey might have built St. Austell Towers as a summer pleasance for himself while meditating Hampton Court.

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G...LS COLL...

At the door Sir Hugo and Marcia were received with due solemnity by a hall porter, who must have been some close relation of that colossal and impenetrable marvel of his kind who did duty at Northumberland House before its demolition, and from whom they gathered that his lordship and the party had not returned from the coverts, and that her ladyship had driven over to the town.

At the door Sir Hugo and Marcia were received with electric bells, a footman and a lady's-maid appeared upon the scene, and Marcia found herself in a chamber looking out upon the park with its deer, and the like of which she had never seen before. For it was a large oak-panelled room, with a great stone window, and a ceiling painted by Verrio. But the furniture was entirely modern, with the one exception of the fireplace, which had an immense carved mantelpiece. Under this, in a recess of Dutch tiles, had been fitted, perhaps by way of contrast, the brightest and most cheerful of little grates; and on the top of the coals billets of pine were sputtering and crackling a welcome, and throwing fitful lights and shadows on the old oak and on some Lelys and Vandycks for which the galleries had not room.

It was pleasant to learn that there were still three hours before dinner, and I believe that young ladies after a long railway journey and a brisk drive in cold weather enjoy tea and hot dry toast as much as Sir Hugo himself was at that moment luxuriating in a glass of whisky and water and a rusk with some devilled caviare.

CHAPTER III

PAPER BUILDINGS in the Temple are strangely altered from what they once were. If you doubt this, make your way to the Inner Temple Library, the courteous librarian of which noble collection will, after duly verifying your credentials, place at your disposal a rare portfolio of old steel engravings and other treasures dating from the days when Ben Jonson wrote masques to be played before Queen Elizabeth in the Middle Temple Hall, and her Majesty showed her appreciation of the entertainment by ordering that the noble chamber should be newly panelled with oak from the wreck of the Armada, down to these later times of the Law Almanack, in which, when the Benchers of an Inn of Court determine to spend their money lest a Radical Government should lay plundering hands upon it, they exhaust their treasure-chest and mortgage the credit of the Inn to erect piles of stone such as the pepper-potted building on the Embankment, which has hardly its equal in London for ugliness. Paper Buildings are now almost entirely occupied by men in active and busy practice, and in term-time the stairs are beset with passengers, from the King's Counsel or Junior hurrying across to the Law Courts, down to the solicitor's clerk or errand-boy, with a brief to be delivered or a consultation to be fixed.

John Douglas had his business chambers on the ground-floor in one of these dull stone buildings, and herein he showed his wisdom; for although the first floor is affected by King's Counsel and even by Juniors in heavy mercantile practice (which they usually owe to private interest),

solicitors have a weakness for the ground-floor, as it saves them the trouble of mounting and again descending a cold stone staircase, trying to the limbs and temper of elderly gentlemen in comfortable circumstances.

But Mr. Douglas' residential chambers were in King's Bench Walk, upon the second floor, and of these few except his clerk knew the secret; for he was a methodical man, who liked to keep the hours of business absolutely apart from those of rest. His career had not been exactly brilliant. He had not rowed in the University eight, or carried off the Newdigate, or done any other of those things which are considered "crack" successes. He had been at Harrow, where he was in the eleven, had proceeded from Harrow to Baliol, where he took a first-class of the kind that is called "solid," rowed in the college eight because he said he wanted exercise, but declined the honour of representing his University at Putney, and left Oxford without a Fellowship, because he had inherited a few hundreds a year from his father, which disqualified him as a candidate anywhere but at St. Asaph's—a corporate body to which he did not aspire to belong. He came to the Bar, and here again worked steadily and with method.

If you do this and wait your time your chance is sure to come, and Douglas' chance came soon. It was no single event, such as the one speech which made the fortune of Erskine. It consisted of a series of small successes which gradually brought him into notice, so that one day, when a gentleman who had for thirty years been standing Counsel to the Kettle-Makers' Company, and half a dozen other City guilds, to say nothing of banks and firms, was raised to the Bench, the bulk of his business gravitated naturally to Douglas, who, as a matter of fact, now counted his income in four figures, of which the first was not a unit.

His tastes were simple, and he could afford to gratify them, and yet live very considerably within his income.

He belonged to the Oxford and Cambridge, he had a small yacht of thirty tons in Dover Harbour, as being of easy access from London, and in the winter hunting and shooting were always ready for him, as he was a capital guest in a country-house, and far too much a man of the world to promote small jealousies by showing the residents the way over a fence, or wiping the eye of his neighbour over a bird.

Douglas was a little over thirty-five years of age, tall, upright, and well set together, with broad shoulders and a deep chest. Perhaps few women would have considered him handsome. Suffice it to say, that he had dark-brown hair which curled crisply, keen grey eyes, a sunburnt complexion, and features which were strongly marked. I have noticed, by the way, that strongly-marked features are seen to advantage under a white wig, and assist a young barrister more than might be generally supposed in his professional career. Douglas was at this moment, the last few weeks of the long vacation, at St. Austell Towers, whither batches of what are called "papers" used to come down to him from town.

A man of strong constitution can get through a considerable amount of work whilst staying at a country house without in any way appearing to withdraw himself from its society; and, indeed, if you do not need to be constantly consulting a library of reference, the amount of work through which you can get in a limited time under the stimulus of country air is astonishing.

Now Sir Hugo had never so much as heard the name of John Douglas, for he never looked at the Law Reports in the *Times*, unless it were to glance at a murder trial, or a piquant divorce case, or a jewel robbery of more than general interest. He had a vague idea that young barristers lived somewhere under the tiles in Pump Court, and made their breakfast off a red herring toasted for them by an Irish laundress.

How some few of them emerged from this obscurity to become judges, or even to occupy the woolsack, was a problem he had never considered. Indeed, of the Bar and of men at the Bar he knew about as much as can be learnt about his Majesty's services from reading Marryat's sea stories and Lever's novels, in which we gather only one side of the life usually led by the King's officers, forgetting other sides such as those shown us in Wellington's despatches.

This kind of ignorance is far more general than might be fancied, even by men who live in what is called the world. And it is perhaps some excuse for Sir Hugo that John Douglas was not yet in Parliament. A seat in the House of Commons is not always a prize which a barrister of eminence need covert, and has long ceased to be in itself a short road to the Bench. Consequently, Douglas had not attempted to get into the House, having indeed other things to do.

But he was known, as I have said, to the great mercantile firms in the City, and the judges listened to his arguments with attention, knowing that he never took are wise, as John Douglas was, you will dine at your club, his clients. In court, in fact, as in the hunting-field, he took his own line; and I have noticed that judges are very like masters of fox-hounds, in one respect at any rate—that they can soon see whether a man is up to his work, and has the right stuff in him.

A barrister in large practice has hardly time to dine out, and certainly none for balls or receptions. He consequently escapes those opportunities of falling in love which offer themselves so freely to gentlemen who have nothing to do after four in the afternoon, and very often nothing to do until noon the next day, unless they choose to mark themselves by excess of zeal, which in his Majesty's Civil Service, at any rate, is by no means the certain road to promotion that might be supposed.

When John Douglas was in London his habits were as methodical as those of a clock. He rose early, had his breakfast at once, and then took a brisk walk or a sharp three-quarters of an hour in the saddle.

If you are in large practice you must b ready for consultation by nine in the morning. Court will take you the whole day. The Court risen, you will have other consultations until seven or thereabouts. Then, if you are wise, as John Douglas was, you will dine at your club, play a game or two of billiards, or join in a rubber, and be in bed as early as possible.

It may be asked how it is that barristers at the head of their profession ever manage to read their briefs. The thing seems at first impossible. And yet we know that it is done. First there is the simple explanation that they are clear-headed men, who get through their work rapidly and yet thoroughly, so that one reading of a case is all they want. Then, too, there is a certain method of compassing their work which they somehow acquire. This is not a secret known to the bulk of the profession, and it is the men that possess it who come to the front. Besides, one case is very like another, and the more you practise at the Bar the more law you learn. It is not the men who write law books and compile digests that get into leading practice, however sound may be their written opinions.

Law, indeed, is in this respect exactly like its sister learned profession, medicine. The men who are deservedly most eminent in it have no time to read, much less to write. They have an experience and knowledge greater than that of books, and are always in advance of the books which are at the time standard authorities.

It may almost be said of them that they make law and medicine for the next generation, and have no occasion to study either the law or medicine of the past.

CHAPTER IV

THE drawing-room at St. Austell Towers was a curious mixture of old, new, and antique, and yet in perfect taste. The oak panelling still remained, but had upon it, hung low and within view, late pictures by modern artists. Above these were mirrors of Venetian glass, with countless tapers that threw quaint many-hued lights. The furniture was in character with the room. There were cabinets, some Louis Quatorze with priceless plaques of porcelain; some of deeply-carved teak and ebony from Burmah, with grotesque and hideous figures on them deeply cut; others of old oak found in hidden Dutch towns and villages, and each was loaded with china, Oriental and European, with Indian work of silver spun out into cobwebs, and with things even rarer than these, such as bowls cut without flaw from a single block of rock crystal; and as counter-marvels of mechanical skill, cunning toys which had taken years in their construction.

A Chinaman, it has been said, will spend ten years of his life in saving the money with which to buy the root of a great elephant tusk. Out of this he will cut a spherical ball, through the holes of which you see another ball, and through those yet another, until the sphere inside completes the magic number of even fifty.

Burmese lacquer boxes, the largest the size of a tea-caddy, the smaller and innermost less than a hazel nut, and silver boxes from the Hague, out of which, when you touched a spring, started a tiny humming-bird, round

which a lady could put her ring, flapped his wings, flirted his tail, vibrated his little beak, trilled a song, and so retired again with a snap into his box.

It was a museum rather than a room had you chosen to spend a couple of days in it. And, on the other hand, there were signs of modern life. For Lord St. Austell, like many other men of unlimited wealth, had also good taste, and everywhere about were vases of exquisite hot-house blossoms; for the sake of which the head-gardener had a joint control over the chamber with the house-keeper, carefully regulating the temperature and taking a pride in his work.

Marcia was not bewildered by this marvellous display. She would have liked, no doubt, a couple of days to herself—a week would not really have been too much—to go through the room leisurely, as if it were a museum. This, however, was a pleasure that might well wait for the first rainy day, which would probably be to-morrow or the day after, two fine days in succession in October being a feat of which our climate is, as a rule, incapable.

So Marcia did as most young ladies do in the vexatious quarter of an hour that precedes dinner—that is to say, she took a seat (on an ottoman covered with rugs of the silver-fox), and waited the turn of events.

Presently, of course, was heard a gong beaten in the most approved fashion, one that would puzzle the most accomplished drum-major in the British Army, and known to few but Burmese and the Chinamen of the Yellow River.

And so came dinner, and Marcia found herself on the arm of John Douglas, whom Lady St. Austell had just presented to her, and to whose charge her hostess had confided her. The staircase was as marvellous after its kind as the room they had left, and was panelled and decorated to match the dining-room, to which latter

apartment, in my humble opinion, every staircase should be assimilated in manner and effect.

And in the dining-room again was black oak, from which the light of the wax tapers glinted back, and above the oak, as on the walls of the staircases and in the hall, were trophies of the chase, and armour and weapons of almost every age and country, from chain mail of the Crusaders down to steel breast-plates worn by Cromwell's Ironsides; from pikes and matchlocks, yataghans and krises, to relics of Waterloo, the Crimea, and the Mutiny. But on the table, with the exception of some rare old silver and china that did duty in the centre, all was modern, down even to the menu daintily written in a little pasteboard volume, which contained for the ladies other trifles, such as a miniature looking-glass and a button-hook for gloves.

Nor need I after this speak of the dinner itself. Any man can give a good dinner if he will give his mind to the task, and the dinner will not be the worse if he can afford rarities.

Lord St. Austell had a good cook and a good butler. He regarded the day's dinner as one of the responsibilities attaching to his wealth, and a duty, or rather a courtesy, due to his guests. In this view his *chef*, his butler, and his head-gardener fully concurred. A dinner at such a table is not a thing to be forgotten. Marcia, ignorant of the difference between *bisque d'écrevisse* and *tortue claire*, and who had never seen in her life red mullet or lamprey, capercailzie or woodcock, except to wonder at them in shops, was fairly bewildered, and had to choose between refusing every dish offered to her, or, in the true spirit of a picnic, accepting the advice of John Douglas, who had the tact to perceive her trouble and the dexterity to help her through it without making her aware of the fact.

On Marcia's right hand was the old Duke of Lincoln, who cared for nothing in the world but pedigree cattle and subsoil drainage, and who consequently, relying on the strength of his title, took his dinner methodically, as becomes a Duke who owns one shire in the grazing counties and half another; and if he had known his Horace, whose very name he had forgotten since he was last flogged at Eton, might perhaps have thought of the ode in the first book, but who wisely contented himself with saying nothing.

On the left Douglas helped her through every difficulty; and here let me own at once, that I care very little for a man who does not carry on well into middle life and past it the heart and feelings of five-and-twenty. Your cynics of thirty are humbugs, bred of the tinpot renaissance we owe to three distinguished gentlemen, and without the infinite power of small-talk which makes the lesser followers of these luminaries entertaining even during the solemn period of dinner. John Douglas was genuine, and so he tried to find out what the girl he had taken down to dinner might care to talk about. If you once strike the true note in a conversation everything will follow smoothly, whether you are at a dinner-table, or in a railway train.

Douglas at a shot began with the flowers in front of him. This led to a discussion upon orchids, and orchid-hunting in tropical forests, and the risks and dangers of orchid-hunters—a class of toilers of whose very existence Marcia was ignorant, having only a vague idea that orchids came from the Brazils. And so the minutes slipped by pleasantly enough for Marcia.

A girl's first ball has had things before it in her life that lead up to it. She has been to the archery meetings and other such gatherings. But her first dinner-party is

an event in her life, and one which few girls forget, even though it may have fatigued and bored them.

In the drawing-room Marcia, by this time thawed, began to feel thoroughly comfortable, if not indeed entirely happy. As she had not in any way made herself remarkable at dinner, there was no set made upon her, and it was a novelty again to be in such a huge room, and to drink tea out of Dresden porcelain, and to play with biscuits, marvels of French manufacture, and to be able now at her leisure to wonder at the room and all that it contained.

And so she sat, still thinking more or less dreamily of everything and nothing, until she noticed that the men were coming up. The coffee did not take long. Most of the men were anxious to get to the smoking-room with its unholy comforts, and most of the ladies were equally anxious to get away. There are many reasons for this, of which I will give some in detail, as they have been imparted to me under terrible vows of secrecy.

In the first place, a good dress must not be worn too long at a time, and even muslin will show signs of wear sooner than might be expected from so simple and apparently innocent a fabric. I have heard, indeed, that a muslin dress must be—I hope my technical terms are correct—"unripped" and "done up" and put together again after its third evening of duty. Silk dresses are a mystery, of the proper management of which I know rather less than do the ladies who wear them of spot pool, or badger-drawing, or boxing the compass. Secondly, the men themselves are believed to hold meetings in what is called the bachelors' room, where the butler makes his appearance with the butler's tray, containing curries and anchovy toast, and other such things, while his assistant brings up the rear with cigars

and strong waters. And thirdly, as the men like the smoking-room, and often occupy it to an hour conventionally unseasonable, so do the ladies congregate in the bedroom of some recognised leader. These be mysteries of the Bona Dea, and I shun the unenviable reputation of Clodius.

But I know that tea taken immediately before bed upsets the nerves and produces sleeplessness unless it be qualified, and that with the aid of a dainty silver tea-kettle and its proper adjuncts, a scale of drinks can be concocted, commencing with hot port wine and water and ending with just that amount of cognac which doctors who know their profession are all agreed is often necessary after a tiring day for a married lady, and occasionally advisable, under her permission, and if mixed by herself, for even married ladies who, after the day's excitement, are feeling a peg too low, and need a sound night's rest to restore the roses to their cheek next morning.

The whole thing was new to Marcia. She did not understand the things she heard talked about, and consequently could not even affect an interest in them. Lady St. Austell had deserted her, not unkindly but entirely, to talk local politics to the Duchess of Lincoln, and so it was a real relief to her to find herself at last in her own room, with the billets still blazing and a sofa drawn before the fire, as if to allure you into sitting up all night. This temptation—and I for my own part know of none more insidious—Marcia resisted stoutly, and was almost immediately asleep, covered by and hidden in that mass of quilts and furs which you seldom see south of the Tweed, but on which a Scotch house prides itself.

And now I must say a word for John Douglas. This bad young man, whose failings it would be untruthful in

me to extenuate, was among the last who sought their quarters in the bachelors' wing, where, at St. Austell Towers licence reigned without restriction. As I want my readers to know him thoroughly, they shall hear exactly what he did.

He was a methodical young man, so he hung up his dress clothes, spreading them wide, and sprinkling them with eau de cologne that they might be freed from the taint of the smoking-room. Then he ensconced himself in an easy-chair and lit a briar-wood pipe, moistening it with some Athol-brose which the butler had specially recommended.

Athol-brose is made in this wise. Upon virgin honeycombs you pour, according to their amount, the oldest French brandy and the most indisputable Scotch whisky in equal proportions. You allow this goodly mixture to stand for days in a large pipkin, and in a cool place, and it is then strained and ready for drinking. Epicures drop into the jug, by way of imparting artistic finish, a small fragment of the honeycomb itself. This I deprecate. But I can conscientiously aver that Athol-brose, whether as first brewed by the butler or whether after diluted by a cautious young gentleman, is a beverage which, judiciously taken, might well have comforted even Job in his most trying moments.

To a landsman after a day in the open air Athol-brose is in its sense as precious as egg-flip to the dwellers in the forecastle. Like egg-flip also, it makes you first contented, then retrospective, and finally drowsy, so that when he had finished his tumbler Douglas turned into bed with that peculiar feeling of delight which comes upon young men when they finish a well-spent day, and oddly enough began to think of his companion at the dinner-table, and to wonder where and how she had been brought up, and even to conjecture whether she

was possibly thinking of himself. This last was very foolish on his part, for I am assured on the best authority that bed with young ladies is an institution too sacred to be disturbed by thought—nay, more, that they fall asleep immediately, and resent being awakened in the morning.

If this be indeed true it is very sad, for it destroys our faith in all the pretty stories about St. Agnes' Eve and so on. But we must not inquire too deeply into certain secrets, and we may be quite sure in any case of this, if a young lady goes to bed with her mind half made up in the evening, she will wake up with it fully made up in the morning, for sleep, like old age, of which the ancients called it the precursor, only strengthens our convictions; and the wise man who told us not to let the sun go down upon our wrath judged well, whereas he who said "Think over it before you go to sleep," has been responsible for infinite mischief. A man is never so selfish as when he is falling asleep and the drowsiness of his body begins to creep to his mind.

Let us do John Douglas justice. He rose early next morning and, to use an intelligible phrase among young men, "shovelled on" a thick suit, in which he took a brisk walk of an hour and a half through interminable shrubberies, returning to his toilet with a swinging step, a clear head, and his mind made up, as he thought—wherein he deluded himself—that he would make up his mind very carefully within the next few days. And this is a dangerous attitude, and one into which a young man should never allow himself to be betrayed, for whereas when his seniors think over matters they usually end by the philosophic determination to do nothing, the young man who allows himself to think things over is almost certain to end by finding that he has done a great deal more than he ever intended.

You may illustrate this, if you have had the experience, by asking the value of your comparative chance from a young man and an old, when you have requested each to do you a good turn, and each has told you that he will think it over and let you know to-morrow, by which time he shall have made up his mind.

CHAPTER V

BREAKFAST that morning was the desultory meal that it usually is in a large country-house. Marcia having ascertained that Lady St. Austell would not be down until ten, deferred her own appearance to that hour. Sir Hugo before descending fortified himself for the discharge of his paternal duties through the day with a brandy and soda, feeling that he had important business upon hand, and might really for once in a way, and under the influence of bracing country air, allow himself that gentle stimulant, with some dry toast as a sort of excuse.

It was nearly half-past eleven before Sir Hugo made his appearance at the breakfast-table, to find that the men had all left for the coverts. There were, however, some few of the ladies scattered at the table, and Sir Hugo liked ladies' society as many thoroughly selfish men do. So he set to work with the appetite of a Roman father, resolved to keep up his system, and in this respect acquitted himself very creditably.

Breakfast in a well-appointed country-house is a meal of delightful variety, a meal to think over and to enjoy leisurely. Young men do themselves lasting injury with mutton chops and strong coffee, and pressed beef and even ale. Sir Hugo had reached an age at which you know better, and at which you have learned to take care of yourself, and to regard a meal as a sort of duty which you owe to society. For men such as Sir Hugo know themselves and their own value, and are Cornaros upon a small scale, although, unless they are confirmed dyspeptics, they like a well-appointed table for its own sake,

however moderately they may indulge their infinite field for choice. So Sir Hugo thoroughly enjoyed his cold partridge and hot tea, and felt so much the better for it as to follow the advice of the butler when that august official suggested, rather than recommended, green curaçoa.

Green curaçoa is said by many persons to be almost as poisonous as kirschwasser, which contains I do not know how much per cent. of prussic acid. So does one of Benson's big regalias contain enough nicotine to kill almost any animal of which I know except a goat. But exactly as some young men find that a big cigar steadies their nerves, so do many of their elders derive comfort from prussic acid, which, judiciously taken, is as valuable an item as any in the pharmacopœia.

Breakfast over Sir Hugo felt some few years younger, and began to seriously consider the business he had in hand. It was keen weather out of doors, so that he had a good excuse for not venturing even so far as the terraces. He loitered out into a large conservatory, and then found himself in the library—an immense room with a gallery running round it, supported on pillars of Derbyshire marble, and with black oak shelves full of rare books, for the late Lord St. Austell had been an inveterate and also a prudent collector. There was a small organ at one end, for the library occasionally did duty as a concert-room, and there were easy-chairs, and tables covered with the latest books from Mudie and Smith and Sons, and with the current reviews and magazines. No club library could have been better appointed or arranged.

Sir Hugo was not much given to reading, for which in his heart he had a certain contempt, believing that if a man knows anything which it is worth your while to know also, he will be much too careful over such a precious secret to put it in a book and make public property of it. But the glass doors of the library commanded the hall and the gallery which ran round it, so that as Lady St.

Austell descended from the gallery by the grand staircase, it happened that Sir Hugo, having just laid down the *Builder*—a weekly paper which he had seen at Boodle's, but had never before interested himself in—was emerging into the hall with the light firm step and upright bearing of an English gentleman who has done his duty before, however painful it may have been, and is prepared to do it again at any sacrifice.

Lady St. Austell hoped Sir Hugo had breakfasted. Did he intend to go later in the day to the luncheon at the covert-side?

Sir Hugo was afraid that the day was rather cold. Lady St. Austell shared in that opinion. She doubted, indeed, if any of the ladies would go, except, perhaps, Lady Deepdale and her daughters, and some few others who seemed positively to revel in October air for its own sake. She herself was just about to visit the conservatories.

Now there is no conservatory attached to Boodle's; and although Marcia had some favourite flowers of her own in a sort of glass sentry-box over the portico in Sloane Street, Sir Hugo troubled himself as little about them as about many other things for which his daughter cared. He had heard of orchids, but did not like to hazard his reputation on the chance of their being in season. As to camelias he felt more certain, for he knew a camelia by sight, and had noticed some in the drawing-room the evening before, so he at once said that he should like to see the camelias, adding that a white camelia had always been his poor wife's favourite flower; and then he shook his head as if he were looking back through the vista of past years, and somehow seemed to find comfort in the idea of camelias.

Now Lady St. Austell was proud of her camelias, as Sir Hugo very well knew. He had, in fact, noticed that the camelias he had seen the evening before were freshly cut, and had not come down by train packed in wool. He consequently soon found himself in the camelia house

with her ladyship, who, although occupied in tying little fragments of white ribbon to the flowers she selected to be cut for the evening, was yet not too engrossed in this pursuit to compliment the exemplary father on Marcia's appearance, and to add that his daughter had a strong likeness to Sir Hugo himself.

There was just enough truth in the compliment to have made it pleasant if you were perfectly certain of its sincerity; for people may tell the truth, and often do, without the least intention of doing so—as when, to take a common instance, you are unwise enough to talk to a man whose name you do not know about a book whose author you have never met, and to express your opinion about that book with frankness, not being aware that you are talking to the man who wrote it.

Sir Hugo did a safe thing under all the circumstances. He sighed, and added that Marcia's health gave him great anxiety. Her ladyship hoped this apprehension was without foundation. At all events Marcia looked, if she might be allowed to say so, robust. Sir Hugo had his doubts. Might he, with the confidence of an old friend now in the sole charge of an only daughter, who was everything in life to him, take Lady St. Austell into his confidence. Certainly he might. So they went on selecting the camelias leisurely. Many of my readers must know from experience that there are pursuits which promote conversation. Angling is not one of these, but the choice of flowers is. So Sir Hugo began to talk.

"Marcia," said Sir Hugo, "is no longer a child, and she is lonely in my dungeon of a house in Sloane Street. I watch her carefully, and am sure that my eye is not deceived. She has, as far as my limited income permits, everything that she can wish. Her pets, her books, her flowers, and her little studio—for she has, I believe, so far as I can see, a genuine instinct for art. Of her music I can speak with confidence, and it is one of my greatest

pleasures to take her to the opera. But I feel that I am no companion for her. Her governess, Fräulein Dietz, is a most accomplished and highly sympathetic lady. But I feel, dear Lady St. Austell, that it is hardly a wholesome life for a girl of Marcia's age to be living in that lonely house with her father, even although he is fortunately able to devote his time to her."

Lady St. Austell assented most cordially; but why did not Marcia go into society?

"How can I take her out?" replied Sir Hugo. "I do what little I can, but my means are sadly straitened. You would be astonished," he added, with a light laugh, "to see how simply we have to live. And I may also say how admirable a housekeeper Marcia makes. Without her our little *ménage* could not possibly be carried on for a week. But there are not many years left me, and I must not allow her, even if I would, to sacrifice her young and bright life for me."

"Marcia ought to marry," said Lady St. Austell decidedly. "It is time she did so, and I do not see why she should not make a brilliant match."

Here was the ball at Sir Hugo's feet. It was the sole remaining object of his life, he declared, with perceptible emotion in his voice, to see his darling and only child comfortably settled, and if he might say so, in a position which he was certain she would adorn, and to the duties and responsibilities of which he knew she would prove equal.

"I can see no difficulty in the matter whatever," said her ladyship. "Marcia's appearance is striking. I may tell you that she has been talked about since your arrival. Even the old Duchess—and Heaven knows she doesn't often praise any one!—has been quite taken by her, and has been asking me all about her. I said of course that I knew Marcia's fortune was not large, but the Duchess laughed the idea of fortune out of the question, and said that Marcia

could marry when she pleased, and wondered where the men had all been to allow her to remain single so long."

Sir Hugo again sighed. It was a sigh capable of many meanings. It expressed gratitude for Lady St. Austell's sympathy, deep affection for an only child, and an untold burden of anxiety as to the future and its possibilities. Sir Hugo managed that sigh and modulated it to perfection.

"There are men in the house at this moment," her ladyship cheerfully continued as she selected her flowers; "there is young Lord Norwich. He is not thirty, and he has seventy thousand a-year if a penny, as I need hardly tell you. It would be a splendid match for Marcia, and one that is quite within her reach. At least I can see no obstacle. Or there is Mr. Davidson, the ironmaster, who I dare say could buy up three such men as Norwich if he wishes. He is a Radical in politics, as you know, and talks to you a great deal too much about his constituents, the puddlers of Coketown, who belong to him as much as does the place itself. But it is the fashion to be a Radical in these days, and Mr. Davidson has many good points. He has raced his own yacht over the Atlantic and won by eleven hours. You must have read of that, and the men here are all agreed about him. I hear that he is a good shot, rides straight, and is as simple and unaffected as the schoolboy that he still looks. I could name others"—here a peculiarly choice camelia was selected—"but these two are the pick of my party, cracks of my team, I think men call it when they are talking of horses. For myself," she added—here another was marked out for the gardener—"I should give the preference to Davidson, who I am certain has a good deal in him, and will modify his radical views as he gets older, and feels the resposibilities of his wealth." Another camelia was selected.

Sir Hugo could hardly find words. Might he rely

on their old friendship? Might he ask her to help him in this most delicate, difficult, and responsible matter? He felt it was one beyond his own powers, needing a tact which he had never possessed, and which he had always felt was an instinct, a natural gift, like Lady St. Austell's own ear for music which he had so often envied her.

Lady St. Austell laughed, and marked another camelia. "There are no black camelias," she said lightly, "any more, my gardener tells me, than black roses. Let us give Norwich the preference for to-night, and the young king of coal and iron can wait a day. Norwich shall take your dear girl down to-night, and—well, we will see."

CHAPTER VI

Lord St. Austell looked, as many of our great landowners do, somewhat commonplace. Until he began to talk to you, or you noticed his easy charm of manner, you would have taken him for a prosperous tenant farmer, or possibly even a squire of sufficient importance to be a justice of the peace. He was a cheerful, hearty, simple man, who having been born to his position and his wealth, took them as a matter of course. He was a good landlord; he was kind-hearted, and no man in the whole county was so popular among his own tenants and those of his neighbours.

English landowners of this type are becoming scarcer every year. They are survivals of Sir Roger de Coverley. Their kind seem doomed to extinction, and it is difficult to see who will take their place. Lord St. Austell was the wrong side of fifty, but as sturdy and hearty as ever, with just a grey hair here and there. He could walk thirty miles before dinner, take his wine afterwards, and sit chatting over his cigar and his one glass of whisky and water while the younger men all round disappeared or fell asleep.

Her ladyship was some six or seven years his junior. She was a kind-hearted woman, but her kindness consisted in making up her mind somewhat at haphazard what was best for her favourite, and then insisting that it should be done. Lady St. Austell was most anxious to make you happy, but you must consent to be happy in her way and after her method, and not according to your own devices.

Edmond About has told us that the Roman Catholic Church holds it an article of faith that the Pope is infallible, and that the opinion is one to which the majority of Popes themselves become in time inclined. Lady St. Austell believed firmly in her own infallibility, and her husband encouraged her belief.

There was once an immense railway navvy who, when his comrades expostulated with him *more suo* for allowing his wife to beat him with a broomstick, replied philosophically that it amused her and it didn't trouble him. In something after this fashion Lady St. Austell was allowed to rule; and although when she approached a cottage the children were sent upstairs to hide under the bed, yet the mothers knew that her ladyship was at heart far more kindly than imperious, and that she was always open to any tale of distress, although, as it was observed, you had to take your medicine as well as your beef and flour and blankets, and to swallow it too.

Nothing pleased her more than to have her advice asked or her assistance called in, as Sir Hugo very well knew; for her character had hardly changed from what it had been five-and-twenty years earlier, when there had been something like little love-passages between the two during the London season, and when Sir Hugo still believed that he should make his mark in the world, and was especially calculated to shine in diplomacy. Her ladyship was still remarkably handsome—tall, erect, and with dark black hair and singularly expressive eyes. She might have been painted as Juno, or Margaret of Anjou, certainly not at any time of her life as an ideal of Tennyson's Enid.

Lord Pentreath, the only child of this happily assorted couple, was a young lieutenant, with as much military distinction as can be won in the Blues, and was at present shooting wolves in the Ardennes.

Having no daughters of her own, Lady St. Austell

liked to take a motherly interest in those of other people, and was always ready to lend herself to any scheme for their welfare, provided that she was properly approached in the first instance, with a due recognition of her judgment, tact, and other sterling qualities. And so she had, as she honestly believed, taken Marcia's welfare to heart as much as if she had been her own daughter; and here let me notice, as the reader may perhaps recollect, that there was a certain resemblance both of disposition and appearance between Lady St. Austell and Marcia which somehow attached the elder woman to the younger, and made it a pleasure, as well as a self-imposed duty, to promote her ultimate happiness in life.

All people with warm hearts are liable to errors of judgment, in which they sometimes obstinately persist; but on the whole they do more good in the world than harm, as it is better for the bulk of young people that they should shape their own course of life as little as possible. Only Marcia was not like the bulk of young ladies, and was quite able to make up her mind for herself, though quite amenable to persuasion when her feelings of affection were in any way roused.

Marcia's day—for I must return to her at last—had passed pleasantly enough. There had been a sort of excursion in three or four roomy brakes, with an attendant flotilla of pony carriages, to some ruins in the neighbourhood, which were, like all other old ruins, very interesting to those who could reconstruct them in imagination, and utterly devoid of interest to those who looked at ruins as things to be sketched or photographed, or painted for the Academy, and not as the fossil homes of history.

I remember being one of the party that drove over from Carmarthen to Llanstephan, and I can declare that the only one who appreciated the ruins thoroughly, and explored every part of it, was an American who had lived all

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his life in the Southern States, and who showed his wisdom by saying as little as possible.

There was five o'clock tea, of course, and dinner this evening was at seven, as usual. When every one was in the drawing-room, and awaiting the welcome sound of the gong, Lady St. Austell entrusted Marcia to Lord Norwich. That young gentleman was a mild, pleasant man of the Saxon type, with light curly hair and blue eyes. He had not much to say, nor was what little he had to say about anything in particular, nor if it had been, would it probably have been profound; but at any rate it was to the point. And he was intensely good-natured, and still as vivacious as when his exuberant spirits used to lead to his being "sent up" at Eton with unpleasant frequency. He had been in the Grenadiers for three or four years, and had left soon after his father died. For he was shrewd enough to know that the owner's eye makes the acre rise in value. But he had still about him all that one really likes in an English schoolboy. He enjoyed any and every form of sport, from shooting a grizzly bear down—I am sorry to say—to drawing that terrible animal's little British cousin, the badger. Perhaps I can best describe him by saying, that if he were laughed at over a fall in the hunting-field, or if his neighbour wiped his eye among the stubbles, he neither showed temper at the time nor bore malice afterwards.

Lord Norwich was kind to his dependents, not with any ultimate object, but because it really pleased him to make people happy; and I am afraid that this really pleasant side in his character led to his being sadly victimised—as, for instance, by the architect who designed his model cottages, and the builder who condescended to superintend their construction.

"And how do you like St. Austell, Miss Conyers?" Lord Norwich commenced by way of safety.

Marcia had never seen such a place before. She was

charmed with it. Now Lord Norwich knew half the country-houses in England, but instead of saying so, and treating her to long descriptions of places she had never seen, he chatted about St. Austell itself, and thence got to the ruins Marcia had visited that afternoon.

This led them somehow to the cities of Bashan, of which she had read and which Lord Norwich had seen. And then they got to a relic of Upper Syria on his watch-chain—the claw of a Syrian bear he had shot in Lebanon; and at last Marcia found herself talking as fluently as if she were sitting in the twilight over the fire with Fräulein Dietz. It was a novelty to sit by a man who could talk vivaciously and yet without even the suspicion of egotism about places which it was one of the secret wishes of Marcia's heart to see; and when Lord Norwich gave her an idea of the Sea of Galilee as he first saw it when he left his tent in the morning, having camped after dark, Marcia so lost herself in interest that she hardly noticed what was going on. And this, of course, was wrong, for conversation at dinner ought to be general, wherefore it was said by Brillat Savarin, that the number at table should never exceed that of the Muses or fall below that of the Graces, on the ground that good conversation and pleasant is the best possible promoter of sound digestion, and that if you get beyond nine you split up into knots, making not one dinner, but two or three; whereas, if there are only two of you, it is certain that the one will bore the other.

But with our big dinner-parties you must accept your fate, and make the most of your next-door neighbours.

Nearly opposite to Marcia sat John Douglas, who was doing his best to extract something better than monosyllables from Miss Heythorp, whose conversational powers were extremely limited.

Miss Heythorp was the daughter of a fox-hunting baronet, of whom it was said at his club by a good-

natured friend, that it was unfair to call Heythorp stupid, and to declare that he had not two ideas in his head. On the contrary, that receptacle always contained exactly a couple, for when once a third made its way into it, it played the young cuckoo in the nest, and was sure to eject one of the others.

Miss Heythorp had somewhat more imagination than her father, and hardly did herself justice. You were apt to think her more stupid than she really was. But her stupidity, much of which was due to an unfortunate shyness, ceased to irritate when you came across what a Californian would term the genuine streak of good-nature and freshness which is so common in English girls who have been brought up at home.

John Douglas had time to look across the table, and somehow or another he did not like what he saw, for he had begun to become interested in Marcia, and he entertained but a poor opinion of Lord Norwich, whom he considered an empty-headed young fellow. And herein he was doubly wrong. In the first place, you have no business to regard a young lady whom you may happen to admire as being more or less your exclusive property; and secondly, however clever you may be yourself, you are never safe in putting a man down for a fool until you have known him for a very considerable time. These are rules of life which can only become branded into you by that awkward and unpleasant kind of experience which follows upon frequent defeats, occasionally at the hands of men whom you have some right to consider inferior to yourself. I do not say that Lord Norwich was not a most estimable young nobleman, of average intelligence and unblemished character. I may add that Douglas knew as much—except, perhaps, that he underrated the intelligence. But it irritated him to see Lord Norwich sitting by Marcia and engrossing her. Men of high ability who have deliberately preferred active life to the life of

the library, are yet in their way as petulant as a scholar whose latinity is called in question. And John Douglas was not yet superior to this kind of vanity. Men indeed are far more vain than women. It is in their nature, as in that of birds, to ruffle their plumes, and strut, and show themselves.

If you want a canary to sing, you must give him another canary to sing against, or you must hang up a looking-glass, in which he sees a rival with distended chest and undulating throat. The old story that the nightingale is a good husband singing to his beloved mate is a fiction only equal to that which represents the robin redbreast as a tender-hearted creature, living upon bread-crumbs.

"Come out!" cries the cock nightingale to a rival whom he hears in the distance. "Come out! Come out here! Here! Here! Come here! Come out! Come here!" This is his exquisite trill.

And this fierce instinct still remains latent in man. The slightest circumstance will bring it to the surface in a moment. Douglas, as he sat at table, was literally fidgetting for a pretext to quarrel with poor Lord Norwich; and if he could have bitten his thumb at him he would probably have done so immediately the ladies had left.

CHAPTER VII

NEXT day the coverts had a rest, and there was nothing to be done except to kill time. Lord Norwich, who had won the hearts of the gamekeepers, repaired, with one or two other choice spirits who knew of the secret, to the home-farm, where the select company spent some hours in worrying a badger, who having been only two days caught, was aggressive and vindictive in his manner, and by no means disposed to recognise a fox-terrier two-thirds his own weight as an acquaintance with whom to familiarise.

Many people consider badger-baiting a brutal sport. So it is if the dog be three or four times the size of the badger, or the badger twice the weight of the dog. I myself, at a certain canine repository not a mile from Charing Cross, have seen a badger with one grip of his jaws tear off the leg of a dog at the shoulder. And a very sickening sight it was! All field-sports are brutal more or less, and the excuse for badger-baiting is identical with that for cub-hunting—it is part of a dog's education, and as such is sometimes said to deserve the recognition of country gentlemen. It certainly is not more cruel than otter-hunting, in which, especially if the spear be not allowed, many of the hounds are always terribly wounded, while the fate of the otter, if he be not promptly tailed for the sake of his skin, is not a picture for humanitarians to consider.

Others of the company repaired to the fir-wood in quest of cock. Most sportsmen will agree with me that there is no sport so keen as that of bringing down a

woodcock; and it is certainly a fact that Chantrey, who once killed three cock at a shot, devoted some weeks to commemorating the feat in a marble bas-relief.

Driven from northern climes that would have starved them,
Chantrey first shot and then he carved them.

John Douglas was somehow missing. He said something at breakfast about a sort of sprain in his ankle. Anyhow, he did not go badger-baiting or cock-shooting, but took a little more than usual care over his morning apparel, and hung about the house and its precincts.

It is one of the great pleasures of stopping in a large country-house at the same time with other guests, that you can stray about and do as you please without being considered to violate the proprieties, or even to be guilty of eccentricity. In fact, you are more or less asked for the express purpose of doing as you please, unless your services be specially required.

You may hunt out the stables, armed with a clay pipe, look at the horses, talk to the grooms, and defer to the superior knowledge of the pad groom and the coachman. Or you may send a request to the head gardener to show you over his hot-houses and forcing-pits. This you will find an expensive tour, gardeners being less sociable than grooms, and more alive to the sight of a half-sovereign.

Or you can stroll round to the houses of the keepers, where you are sure to find enough to interest you if you care in the least either for sport in its ordinary acceptation, or for natural history as Gilbert White understood it. The keeper's lodge indeed is, if he be equal to his work and responsibilities, a small museum of the natural history of the county. I will leave the home-farm out of the question. No man cares for cows or pigs or poultry unless he owns land of his own.

Instead of visiting hot-houses, or the keeper's lodge, or the home-farm, Douglas sauntered about the house—a place so huge that your movements attracted but little attention. First, by way of keeping up appearances, he strolled into the billiard-room, which he found deserted, with the brown holland over the table, and the heavy iron preparing itself for work over a little brazier of glowing charcoal. The library was also vacant. It is a curious fact that leather-binding—especially morocco leather—seems to gather strength in the night and to smell more powerfully in the morning, as we are told that flowers do when the dew is upon them. Perhaps John Douglas may have disliked the smell of morocco, or may not have felt disposed to glance over Audubon's "Birds of America," in elephant folio. Anyhow, he passed through the side-door of the library into what was known as the writing-room, because it had one or two small tables in it at which you could write if you pleased, and a letter-box on the mantelpiece, letters dropped into which fell through the wall into a miniature pillar-box in the hall. And here, oddly enough, were Marcia and the Duchess of Lincoln. The Duchess was welcome to him. Her presence gave him time to collect himself, or, as sporting gentlemen say, pull himself together.

Besides, she was, as the phrase goes, a dear, good kind old lady, who was never in the way, and might in fact, with infinite advantage to her young friends, have put herself in the way more often than she did.

The duchess kindly commenced the conversation. She thought it was a fine day. Douglas agreed. He was sorry to be a prisoner, but was detained in the house sorely against his will by a sprained ankle. The duchess had heard that a sprained ankle should be rubbed with a judicious mixture of yellow soap, brown sugar, spirits of hartshorn, and Scotch whisky, and should then be sewn up in unbleached flannel and allowed entire rest.

Douglas promised to try this famous cure if he were not better within a few hours. Marcia, appealed to by her Grace, had no experience in the treatment of sprained ankles, but had been told by Fräulein Dietz that bruised poppy-heads—the big poppy-heads that you see in big jars in the windows of chemist's shops—were a sovereign specific in the shape of a poultice, and alleviated pain almost magically.

The Duchess considered poppy-heads dangerous. You might take too much of them, as you might chlorodyne. She had heard, moreover, that laudanum was made from poppies, and had never herself countenanced the practice of rubbing it into the face for toothache.

Douglas had to explain that his accident was slight, and probably only needed rest. He would be all right in four and twenty hours. Meantime, in such glorious air, and in a house with chambers of such proportions, one could well forego violent exercise for so short a period. Then the conversation became general, and in its course Douglas succeeded fully in securing something more than the Duchess' transient good opinion. She knew that he was a barrister, and had expected to find him something after the type of the majority of barristers described in fiction—a sort of Sergeant Striver.

Clearly this young man could not belong to this class, and as the Duchess had just formulated this opinion, she was summoned by her maid, who came to say that his Grace would like to see her for a few minute. And so it came to pass that Douglas and Marcia were left alone.

What was the conversation about, and how was it carried on? I cannot tell you, for the simple reason that it was natural, and so wandered from one subject to another. They talked about field-sports, and Scotch scenery, and Highland customs, and yachting, and then of even lighter things, such as the last opera, and the last novel, and the latest variety of chrysanthemums, and a book of

travel that had just set all London talking, because a number of people who knew all about it declared it to be a tissue of inventions, and were in their turn denounced by a number of other people who knew all about it as being animated by personal jealousy. It had been the "gorilla book" of the season, and they had both read it.

Now I do not believe in love at first sight. But it is quite possible upon a very short acquaintance for a feeling to spring into existence which may easily develop, according to the circumstances, into either love or strong friendship. Marcia, to use an old expression which, like many of its kind, is extremely felicitous, was "taken" (not the French *épris*, but our honest English taken) with this young man, whom she knew to be so clever, and who yet was so simple and almost youthful in his manner, and who took so pleasant and keen an interest in simple things. Douglas, on the other hand, found in Marcia a something unlike what you would expect to find in a young lady of her age, inasmuch as she was grave and thoughtful and intelligent; and as his mind reverted to the Duchess, who had so opportunely left them, it occurred to him that in the fitness of things Marcia was suited to be a Duchess, if not indeed obviously intended for that exalted position. And this was a dangerous frame of mind, both for Marcia on her part and for Douglas on his own. And as I do not intend to take down my Shakespeare to remind myself how Othello and Desdemona fell in love, I will not pursue the parallel, although in many points it would be similar, or to say the least, suggestive. For Sir Hugo had many points in him which resembled Brabantio, although he lacked much of that old gentleman's dignity.

How the conversation might have ended or into what channels it might have strayed I am not prepared to state, but it was interrupted by the appearance on the scene of Lady Gwendoline Anstice, who burst into the room like

a tornado, in quest, or pretended quest, of a novel which she thought she must have left there, plunged at once into the conversation, and began to flounder about in it after her own most helpless fashion, and evinced not the least intention of taking her departure.

Lady Gwendoline talked in much the same monotonous fashion as that in which a water-spout with a leak in it will drip in rainy weather, and I believe was under the honest delusion that she had exceptional conversational gifts. Marcia did not like to go, and Douglas on his part saw that to take his departure would be a false move. So they sat still, and Lady Gwendoline cackled to them.

I dislike slang, but can conscientiously declare that cackle is the only word in the English language which expresses my meaning.

And here let me give a word of advice to ladies who, finding themselves, let us kindly say, nearer thirty-two or even thirty-five than they care to generally admit, and who, having read of Madame de Stael and other such ornaments of French *salons*, endeavour to cultivate the art of conversation—perhaps the most difficult of all arts, and one in which the very greatest men have often conspicuously failed. A young lady should not talk as if she felt it incumbent upon her to join in the conversation; on the contrary, she should rather endeavour to say just enough to show that she is following it and is interested by it. She is usually troublesome if she endeavours to take a leading part, and still more troublesome if she asks frivolous questions.

Now Lady Gwendoline would without hesitation have plunged into the lunar theory with an Astronomer Royal, or have taken the late Mr. Browning to task over his "Paracelsus." She talked for the sake of talking, and her conversation was consequently as vacant and wearying as the whistle of a railway porter when he has nothing to do but to loiter about the platform with his hands in his pockets.

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On the other hand, Lady Gwendoline Anstice knew very well how to manage a stupid man, and if she found herself out of her depth with John Douglas, could have succeeded to a marvel with Lord Norwich.

And if the truth must be told, Lady Gwendoline had set her cap at Lord Norwich, and ably assisted by her mother, Lady Deepdale (a match-maker of wide experience and acknowledged success), was at present engaged in laying siege to that eligible young nobleman.

This made her, of course, anxious to annoy Marcia, who, she took it for granted, had, as she would have phrased it herself, intended business with Lord Norwich last night, and was only keeping in her hand with this young barrister in the morning. So she remained out of mere spite, or as ladies, I believe, term it, "aggravation," —the corresponding Americanese is, as I understand, "cussedness,"—pouring out a ceaseless flood of nothings until the luncheon-bell rang.

The party at lunch included Sir Hugo, of course, Douglas, and nearly all the ladies, from her Grace downwards, although most of the men were absent. Lord Norwich came in from his morning's sport with a strong aroma about him of tobacco-smoke and the stable, not unmixed with a stronger flavour, in which an experienced nose would at once have detected the peculiar fragrance of a badger, an animal ranking in this particular gift of nature next only to the polecat.

An awkward attempt to mask his morning pursuits with eau de cologne had only intensified the evidence against him and aggravated the offence. He made himself, however, entertaining after his own fashion to Marcia, so that her father was greatly pleased, and began to consider that his self-sacrifice in leaving Boodle's would, like other virtuous actions, have its own reward—a portion of which he anticipated in the shape of some peculiarly choice Madeira, thoughtfully tendered him by the head butler.

Lunch ended as lunch ought to, it being a meal which is somehow understood to be like breakfast, with no definite beginning or end, and consequently not requiring the solemnity of initial or final invocation or thanksgiving, even although a bishop may be present in the full glory of his gaiters and upright collar. The guests straggled out as they had straggled in, and Marcia soon found herself dressed for a cold day, and waiting under the colonnade for Lady St. Austell, with whom she was to drive down to the bridge, and so cross the river, and back through the woods. She had barely time to admire the indications given by the long colonnade of its summer glories, before the victoria arrived, and Marcia found herself side by side with her kindly hostess, covered with a rug of priceless silver fox, and rattling briskly down the avenue, glorious even in winter, past the home-farm and the kangaroo sheds, over the lake, past the rookery and the deer, and so at last in the open road.

And here it was, when the rattle of the feet of the stout little cobs rendered the conversation inaudible to the solemn and self-absorbed occupants of the box, that Lady St. Austell took up her parable.

I will not undertake to describe her ladyship's manner or method. Each in its way was perfect. She was kindness itself to Marcia, speaking to her in the manner of a mother, which she was able to assume at once, by explaining that the rug which Marcia so much admired consisted of skins perhaps the most prized in the world, because the rarest, with the exception of sable and ermine. They were trophies of the chase, brought home by her son from the extreme north of Canada—in fact, out of the Hudson's Bay territory; and so from eulogy of her son's skill and power of endurance as a Nimrod, she glided into discreet praise of young Norwich, whose many manly virtues she extolled with the utmost tact. She had heard that he rode magnificently to hounds, and had

ridden second on his own horse for the Grand Military at Sandown, securing it the next year on a chestnut, the property of his Colonel, and so vicious as to be a terror to the oldest rough-riders at Knightsbridge and Windsor.

This led her to descant not only upon Lord Norwich's excellent qualities, but also upon his position, which its wealth and its responsibilities—wealth almost beyond the power of man to exhaust, and possibilities that would be infinite if only his undoubted natural abilities were stimulated and directed into the proper channel by sympathy and tact. This eulogy, though most adroitly planned and phrased, somehow hung fire with Marcia, who could not help thinking for the life of her of the immense difference, when all was said, that separated Lord Norwich, with all his good-nature and versatility, from the reserved and masterful John Douglas. It was the difference almost between Prince Rupert and John Hampden—each of whom was beyond question the highest ornament of the side on which he drew his sword.

I wish to say nothing unkind of Lord Norwich. I will prove as much by declaring my conviction that he was brave, generous, and utterly incapable of anything unworthy either in act or thought, differing herein from many other young men of his age and liable to his temptation. But in her own mind Marcia never even dreamed of comparing him with Douglas. Indeed, the two men were so utterly dissimilar in every way that the only comparison was one which intensified the contrast.

So that when Lady St. Austell began to somehow suggest that Lord Norwich, with his title, his wealth, his infinite good-nature, and his many sterling qualities, would make an excellent husband, and deserved a wife who would appreciate him and stimulate him to something higher and more worthy of his abilities than the chase and the racecourse, Marcia hardly, if at all, caught the drift of her ladyship's praise of this young man; and

while agreeing with all that fell from her hostess of well-deserved encomium, failed to see how it in any way concerned herself, until Lady St. Austell, in the most simple manner possible—and truth to tell, with almost Bismarckian bluntness—came straight to the point by expressing her conviction, in fact, she might say her knowledge, that Lord Norwich admired Marcia greatly, and that he would be, apart altogether from his position, a husband of whom any girl might be proud.

This fairly startled Marcia out of all her usual self-possession, and she found herself almost stammering out that she was fully alive to these excellent qualities which Lord Norwich undoubtedly possessed, and which lay evidently and unmistakably upon the surface, but that the idea of becoming Lady Norwich had never crossed her mind, and took her entirely by surprise. Wherein she was speaking the exact truth, as young ladies usually do when an intelligible proposition is laid before them which requires an immediate answer, and, if I may say so, takes them unawares.

Marcia could only murmur something in general praise of the object of discussion which she did with obvious sincerity. For his frankness and good-nature were beyond all question genuine, and Marcia felt honestly that her ladyship had gone little, if at all, in her praise further than the limits of exact truth. So she could only say that it was impossible to meet Lord Norwich without seeing at once his many admirable qualities, and above all his utter absence of anything like egotism, his evident kindness of heart, and his extreme good-nature.

And as Marcia put all this in her own way, instead of in the phraseology in which I have chosen to summarise it, Lady St. Austell had the penetration to see that she was saying exactly what she meant, and had also the tact to divert the conversation into other channels, and for the present to wait upon events instead of precipitating them.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT evening there was a dinner-party at St. Austell Towers. There was the lord-lieutenant, with his wife and two daughters; and there was the Bishop of the diocese, also accompanied by his wife, three eligible daughters, and his domestic chaplain.

The lord-lieutenant was a tall, largely built man, with no power of consecutive thought, and certainly none of consecutive conversation. He detested railroads, and motor cars, the former of which he believed had lowered prices all over the country, and made the working classes far too independent. His general appearance was that of a sergeant-major in a regiment of heavy dragoons. He stood with his legs wide apart, talked in the tone of voice of an adjutant in the orderly-room, and occasionally indulged in an oath. He did not approve of swearing in the abstract, but he considered it a duty to use a little strong language about such things as Mr. Asquith's latest speech, and the turnip fly, and the increase of poaching, thereby asserting his position, and showing that he was not one of the ordinary herd, who under an Act of Parliament still in force can be, and sometimes are, fined five shillings for each profane word they use. He was very pompous, very prejudiced, very stupid, and very kind-hearted.

The Bishop might have been taken for a butler had it not been for his buckles, apron, purple coat with turned-up collar, and other outward and visible signs of the inward and episcopal grace. He had been seventh wrangler. He had edited the Epistle to the Galatians, and he had a large family of daughters whom he planted out in mar-

riage year after year, providing for his sons-in-law out of the livings in his gift. In reality he was a shrewd man of the world, and would have given much to have been able to begin life over again.

There was of course the usual allowance of county squires and gentlemen, and there was Lord St. Austell's agent, a fat man with a fat watch-chain, who kept himself in a corner as if he were present on suffrance. And most of these guests had brought their wives, and some their sons and daughters, so that the immense room would have appeared full were it not that lord-lieutenants and bishops and peers of the realm dwarf ordinary folk, until you are hardly aware of their presence or even existence.

Let me give the conversation for once and for all. It was the ordinary conversation at St. Austell Towers. You can hear it at all large country-houses. Much of it wearied Marcia, not a little of it made her almost indignant.

A neighbouring squire declared that it was impossible to make sheep pay. The importation of all foreign cattle ought to be stopped, and he would not even mind a heavy duty on tinned meat, which lowered the price of home produce, and was usually very unwholesome.

Lord St. Austell was very doubtful whether farming would pay its way for many years longer. No doubt steam had been a great blessing in many ways. But in others it had been of doubtful advantage; and he wanted to know what the farmers were to do when all our great towns got their butter and eggs from France and their cheese from Normandy, and when corn from the Danube was so cheap that it no longer paid a tenant farmer to grow sound red wheat?

A colonel of hussars from York opined that it was the Radicals who did all the mischief—men like Lloyd George and Winston Churchill and Keir Hardie who set class against class.

The Bishop considered that to set class against class was sinful. The earth was the Lord's and the fulness thereof; and it was not for man to repine when Providence showered its bounties on him. And he then finished the half-breast of a particularly fine woodcock.

The Bishop's chaplain was stimulated by this into the expression of his conviction that the poor were being educated above their station, and that discontent was the inevitable consequence.

Lady St. Austell could confirm the fact. It was almost impossible to get a good domestic servant, and as soon as you had secured one, and she had learnt her duties, and saved twenty pounds, she was sure to marry some worthless fellow from the nearest town, and emigrate with him. It was really dreadful, and it would soon become a very serious question what we were to do for servants at all.

So the conversation rambled on, and Marcia found it intolerably dull and even irritating. But there is an end to everything, even to a dinner of ceremony, and it was a relief to follow in the train of Lady St. Austell to the drawing-room, where the ladies, until the men joined them, talked about nothing at all, infusing into that substratum just enough of venom to make it piquant.

Before long the men arrived upon the scene, and to Marcia's pleasure John Douglas somehow singled her out at once, and came up with still a marked lameness, but otherwise looking—I speak for men—as fine and well-built a young giant as any one in the room.

Sir Hugo had been drinking Chambertin. This most excellent of parents could carry his liquor with any man. But, on the other hand, Chambertin is a wine which has peculiar virtues of its own. It has a delicious bouquet, and it is very strong. It is a wine that young men do not appreciate as they ought, and which their seniors

are sometimes apt to appreciate rather more than is good for them.

Sir Hugo seemed to feel his veins expanding, and began again to think of how comfortably he could live in lodgings somewhere near his Club if he could only get the house in Sloane Street off his hands. He consequently looked round about with the purest of paternal motives to see what Marcia was doing, and how she was improving the shining hour. He noticed that she was talking to Douglas and not to either Lord Norwich or Mr. Davidson. But the Chambertin made him disposed to take all things cheerfully, and a cup of coffee so steadied his nerves that a little later in the evening, when the ladies had finally departed, he took a hand at bridge, and in the end went to bed with his heart full of the most noble sentiments, and his waistcoat pocket of half-sovereigns.

Douglas, meantime, was talking earnestly to Marcia, and, as it were, cross-examining her. There was much in her that was certain to please a man of his temperament. We all know what Byron says of a certain large class of young ladies:

The nursery still lisps out in all they utter;
Besides, they always smell of bread and butter.

Marcia had nothing about her of the school in question. And so the two were soon busily engaged.

Good Burgundy makes a man bold if he has been wise enough to take it in moderation. The presence of a handsome woman puts him upon his mettle. Other causes may easily concur to make him more or less self-confident, possibly with sufficient reason. I know a man who said, and I believe truthfully, that he had never "proposed," as the term is, but once in his life, and that even then he was not aware that he had done so until the fact was brought home to him the next

morning. And he found himself married before a month was over without having the faintest notion how it all came about.

John Douglas was hardly of this type. I am not going to give my readers exactly what he said, but it was simple and to the point. It ended by his telling Marcia that he should find out Sir Hugo immediately after lunch the next day, and by his begging a camelia pinned in her dress to nerve him for the encounter.

It is curious that when a man is in earnest his jokes, unless bitter, are sure to be intensely feeble, and his attention to really unimportant trifles excessive. But we are all the creatures of convention. "Mr. Sambo," the gentleman with the bones used to remark to the gentleman with the banjo, "you say something funny." Why this should have been the invariable prelude to a negro melody I have always failed to understand. So I have never been able to see why, from time almost immemorial down to the day when Corisande gave Lothair a rose, the gift of a flower should be a thing almost as full of consequences as was once the plucking of an apple. I do not attempt to explain the fact; I only state it. And I may add, that the flower imparted some sort of indefinite charm to John Douglas' disposition and manner. For whereas earlier in the day he had irreverently spoken of Sir Hugo to one or two of the other men as being an old ass, he now seemed disposed to extend to him a certain measure of toleration, if not indeed of positive respect; and whereas he had also somewhat snubbed poor harmless, good-natured Lord Norwich, he now condescended to chat with him pleasantly about things in general, even down to the chances for next year's Derby and the latest innovations in burlesque. So that his lordship next day spoke of Douglas to the other men as being a devilish clever fellow and not at all stuck-up. And this will show my readers how easy it is to make yourself

pleasant if you will only take the very slightest amount of trouble.

As for Marcia, I need not set out at length what was passing through her mind. But I shall do no harm if I give a few salient points. She had a contempt for her father which she had never consciously avowed to herself until it dawned upon her that she could change the whole tenor of her existence, and leave him actually the more comfortable for the change.

He would have his club and a bedroom in St. James's Street, or somewhere close off it. He might even take a set of chambers and keep a man-servant at a less expense than that entailed by the melancholy old house in Sloane Street. He would be more comfortable and more at his ease in every way, and Marcia felt sure that her father would bear the shock with fortitude of the most approved stage stamp.

All this flashed upon her at once. Then, too, she would also be able to provide a comfortable home for dear old Fräulein Dietz—a home where she would have no little worries and anxieties, and would be able, as it were, to sun herself and to enjoy the luxury of doing nothing with no responsibility attached to the doing of it. And besides, she had made up her mind that she liked John Douglas, and although his proposal had come upon her most unexpectedly she never hesitated for a moment in accepting it. She could see that he was a man who meant to make his mark, and she felt certain that she could help him. And she liked him better than any one she had ever known. Beyond this she did not extend her horizon.

She did not calculate on the possibilities open to Douglas of the ermine, or possibly of the woolsack. She was quite content, and more than content, to share his fortunes as they were. Other things occurred to her upon which I need not dwell, but which in no way altered her

resolution, serving rather, indeed, to fortify it. And the board being thus cleared, she, both in metaphor and physically, put down her foot and resolved that she would marry John Douglas at any cost, checking herself, like a fair-minded girl as she was, by the reflection that there was no cost in the matter to anybody concerned, unless indeed it were to Douglas himself, who might perhaps have waited a little longer and done a great deal better. Even this she hardly admitted in her own heart, and so it did not much discomfort her.

Lord Norwich she thought of almost tenderly, but prudently concluded that he would soon find consolation elsewhere, even if he liked her as much as Lady St. Austell had declared. And so ended her reflections.

Lord Norwich, on his part, was smoking a big cigar before his bedroom fire, and moistening it with whisky and soda. I make no imputation of intemperance, for the whisky was largely diluted, and an Eton boy might have drunk a pint of the mixture with impunity.

And so one by one the lights in the great house, not unlike human lives, were either extinguished or allowed to burn down in their sockets; and nothing broke the silence except the clock from the tower, with perhaps now and again the yelp or bay of a hound from the kennels.

CHAPTER IX

EARLY next morning John Douglas breakfasted with such of the party as were assembled, and waited patiently for Sir Hugo. He ascertained that coffee and other light refreshments, together with the *Morning Post* and his letters, had been sent up to that gentleman's room. So Douglas sauntered about the house, first taking due precaution that he should be at once informed of Sir Hugo's descent. He would have enjoyed a cigar on the terrace, but he knew that the smell of tobacco about him might possibly give Sir Hugo a handle for an objection to his habits and general mode of life. So he resorted to the billiard-room, where he amused himself by what is called knocking about the balls. This is an occupation which seems to comfort men pretty much as knitting comforts women. It gives them something to do, and so relieves the irritation always produced in an active mind by absolute physical idleness.

On the other hand, you can practise the most complicated cannons, and the boldest of winning together with the subtlest of losing hazards, and be thinking of something else the whole time. The charm of all this is broken at once if you play yourself plain against spot, or spot against plain, which makes you lose your temper with yourself, and viciously concentrate your attention on the science of kinetics, thereby upsetting the philosophic equilibrium of your mind.

Douglas was in the midst of what for a mere amateur was a really fair run of spot strokes, when he was informed by an attendant, who had had what barristers'

clerks call a special retainer, that Sir Hugo had descended, and was in fact occupied in the breakfast room. Repairing thither, Douglas found the occupation in question to consist in artistic appreciation of a Perigord pie and a glass of chablis—excellent things, which may be safely recommended by the youngest of physicians to the most anxious of parents whose system required support, or, for the matter of that, to anybody whose taste is sufficiently cultured to appreciate flavours so delicate as those of the truffle, and a wine which after all differs little, except as a matter of curiosity, from Château Yquem.

Douglas, by way of excuse for entering the room, broke a biscuit and just tasted a small cup of coffee. Sir Hugo, always good-natured when he had no immediate troubles or wants, and nothing to remotely rouse his selfishness into action or even suspicion, opined jocularly that Douglas had been sitting up late. Douglas replied that he had been up for some hours, and had really been waiting to see Sir Hugo. Sir Hugo allowed himself a stare which did not exceed the bounds of civility, and wondered to himself what the devil was coming.

These were his exact words, as he afterwards told the story to one of his most intimate friends at Boodle's.

Then began an encounter in which there was really some brilliant fence; and as the servants began to appear upon the scene, an adjournment by tacit consent was made to the terrace. Douglas began by informing Sir Hugo of his position and prospects. This a fencing-master would call an engagement in prime. Sir Hugo, guessing what was coming, parried it at once. He congratulated Douglas heartily. It was always pleasant, he observed with a sigh, to old fellows like himself who were going down the hill to see a young man making way up it, and to know that he was putting his best years to better purpose than they themselves had done. At the same time,

nothing in life was certain. Even land, he added, in these Radical days seem to melt in your fingers.

Douglas agreed that land had been much affected of late years by legislation of an advanced Liberal character, but added that there were other investments, such as the funds, which were absolutely safe, and differed from land as involving less trouble in their management. He wished, however, he continued, to speak to Sir Hugo about an entirely different matter. He wished, in fact, to ask Sir Hugo's sanction to a promise Miss Conyers had already given him.

Sir Hugo in the most gentlemanly way exclaimed, "God bless my soul!" Sir John Hare himself could not have given the four words more of an old gentleman's dignity and sense of responsibility, and Douglas found himself once again disengaged.

"I had the permission of Miss Conyers himself," he exclaimed, "to speak to you as I have, and I shall be glad—in fact, it will be a duty—to inform you in what quarters you can obtain independent information as to my present position, and what I think are my reasonable prospects in life."

Nothing would have gratified Sir Hugo more had time permitted it. He had, in fact, heard himself of the rising reputation of Mr. Douglas, and of many other things that spoke highly—he might say most highly—in his favour. But the welfare of his only daughter—he ought rather to have said his only child—had been, since her lamented mother's death, the one thing that bound him to this world. When he had once seen her settled as he wished, he should feel that his own work in life was concluded and his labours over. And—here he succeeded in the adroit manœuvre of disengagement immediately under the wrist—he might tell Mr. Douglas in confidence, and as a man of the world and also a man of honour speaking to another, that his daughter's marriage was a thing almost

settled. "And so," he added, extending his hand frankly to Douglas, "let us, my dear sir, regard this conversation as if it had never taken place, and hope that it may end matters which when fully and frankly explained, as I hope I have endeavoured to do, need cause no trouble and give rise to no regret."

All this was very pretty, but I may add that it was altogether too much for Douglas. You can argue with the most dogmatic judge on the Bench, because he cannot dismiss you with platitudes. But there is no arguing with a man who firmly and politely declines to argue at all, and Douglas very nearly lost his temper.

"I have told you, Sir Hugo," he said, "that I have already the consent of Miss Conyers herself. Until she recalls that consent as explicitly as she has given it to me, I can only regret your refusal to sanction it. More than this I need hardly say, except that you must not consider me for a moment to regard your own decision just announced to me as in any way ending the matter."

Sir Hugo assented as courteously as if they had been discussing the most ordinary matter, requiring nothing but grace and tact and polish for its successful management. He made a slight gesture indicating, in a manner worthy of the great monarch himself, that it was in his power when he chose to bow with consummate grace, but that for the present, at any rate, his bow was a courtesy of civilised warfare and nothing more.

Douglas, on his part, answered with a stiff inclination of the body capable of many interpretations, all more or less uncomplimentary, and so turned upon his heel. It is astonishing how much can be compressed into a bow if you have that much passing through your mind at the time, and intend to distinctly let as much be understood.

And so the two men parted, Douglas after all not much disconcerted, and Sir Hugo, in spite of his im-

perturbable manner, in reality full of wrath, as most men are who have lived to secure their own selfish purposes, and have somehow not exactly succeeded. For he could see that John Douglas had sufficient force of character to prove very troublesome, and certainly did not need to be told that Marcia, in all matters of real importance, had a will of her own.

So in a vague kind of way he foresaw trouble—that is to say, personal annoyance and discomfort. And he even began to wonder seriously whether it would not be best to make some inquiries, and perhaps to give his consent upon conditions which would rid him of the gloomy house in Sloane Street and enable him to spend the remainder of his days in well-earned comfort. After all, he reflected, with a complacency worthy of Mr. Turvey-drop himself, there was no certainty that Marcia would marry either Lord Norwich or the ironmaster, or, for the matter of that, that either of them would offer himself as a son-in-law in a proper spirit. For he felt like old Mr. Cobbledyke in that admirable novel by the authors of "Ready-Money Mortiboy," that whoever married his daughter must be prepared to make settlements, and that the settlements must be such as Mr. Cobbledyke contemplated, only more suited to his own rank and position in life.

Then it occurred to him that after all there is better security in land and in iron-fields and furnaces than in any professional prospects, however brilliant. So that in stopping this doubtful marriage he would be really doing his duty to Marcia, and acting as every father with a proper and indeed Christian sense of his duty ought to act.

And apparently he found comfort in these reflections. It is astonishing with how little effort a thoroughly selfish man can persuade himself that he is doing his duty.

John Douglas had a quick temper, which, as he kept it under absolute control in the exercise of his profession, gave him the more trouble in private life. He left the

terrace burning with a desire to kick the selfish old man the whole length of it. Indeed, Sir Hugo would hardly have stepped along so jauntily if he had had the least idea of what was passing in the young man's mind.

Clearly, however, there were two things for Douglas to do at once: one was to see Marcia for himself, and the other to arrange that his clerk should telegraph for him to return to London without delay. The latter piece of strategy only required a stroll down to the village. The former was more difficult, for where Marcia was at that moment he did not know, nor did he know of whom to inquire. So he sauntered about the house and grounds, waiting upon time for his chance.

At last he boldly went into the library and wrote Marcia his first letter to her. I am not going to reproduce this epistle, but I will say that it was a model. It told Marcia exactly and briefly what had occurred, and added that as Sir Hugo's consent had been refused in a manner that was evidently intended to be final, he wished her to know that he himself should wait patiently until the time came when she would have the right to decide for herself. He should return to town that day. It would be hardly likely that they would meet in London for some little time; but, he added, months slip away while you are counting days and hours, and it would not be many months before the time would come when they need never be parted again. He should like to write to her in the interval, but would not do so without her permission.

This letter he managed by some exercise of diplomacy to get conveyed to Marcia, and before many minutes, although to him they seemed innumerable, he received an answer sufficiently characteristic:

"Do not leave The Towers until I have seen you.

"M. C."

And now, for every historian must be truthful, I have to record that John Douglas, instead of doing anything unpractical, such as kissing the letter, put it most methodically into his note-case, which he carried in an inner pocket, and then in the spirit of a soldier going into action, resolved to make certain of meeting Marcia before the day was over.

He had not long to wait, and fortune favoured him. Sir Hugo, feeling that a small glass of brandy and curaçao would restore his nerves and give a tone to his system, went in quest of that most unwholesome but not unpleasant compound. One of the servants who was putting away the plate divined at once what was wanted of him and provided the necessary cordial with a promptitude really wonderful. Sir Hugo drank a glass of it on the spot, and sipped a second deliberately. The hour perhaps was early, but a footman in a large house is like a Club waiter in one most valuable quality—nothing ever allows him to be betrayed into astonishment.

I once saw an experiment tried upon a Club waiter to test this great truth. He was ordered to bring a large wine-glass of brandy and chili vinegar, and saw about a gill of the mixture tossed off without moving a muscle of his features.

And let me add, *par parenthèse*, that if you have gone through the ice, or have come in positively cramped from a Scotch mist, a moderate dose of this especial compound is as good a "corpse-reviver" as you can select, and more wholesome than might be supposed.

While the excellent parent was thus occupied Douglas waited in the library. The room was well chosen, it being at that moment entirely deserted. Nor had he long to wait. Before he had almost mechanically cast his eye down a column of the *Field*, Marcia came in, walked straight up to him, and held out her hand.

"I am sorry," she said, "that you are going. I sup-

pose there is no help for it. But we shall meet again in London before long, I hope."

This was refreshingly frank, as Douglas knew that Marcia in London hardly went out at all. She had given him, indeed, pretty much the same account of her daily life as that which I have given the reader.

What ought Douglas to have said? It is odd that at these precise junctures a clever man finds his power of expression hopelessly gone. But he looked Marcia straight in the eyes, and took her hand, and said, "Good-bye. It is not for long."

"Not very long," she laughed, "but while it lasts we must wait. Meantime, do not imagine that I shall ever change. I have given you my promise, and I shall keep it."

"We must wait, I suppose," said Douglas.

"There is no help for it." This was prosaic, but it was about the only thing to be said.

Then Douglas, I grieve to say, degenerated into poetry, or to use the expressive phrase of Mr. Silas Wegg, "dropped into" it. On the little finger of his left hand was a diamond ring—a single brilliant in a perfectly plain hoop.

Opinions differ as to whether men ought to wear jewellery or not. We know from classical authors that a Roman barrister in large practice used always to carry an immense ring, and flourish it at the jury. Juniors with a smaller practice used to hire a ring for the day, paste at that time not having been discovered or invented. A small diamond of the first water is perhaps permissible, —it is not like one of those obtrusive gems the size of a hazel-nut, with which bill-discounters and meat salesmen and bookmakers love to dazzle you.

Douglas took the ring, and slipped it on to the third finger of Marcia's left hand.

"The stone was my mother's," he said, "and she had it set for me the day I was called."

And then this bad man with true legal ingenuity equi-

vocated, for he pretended to kiss the ring as if he were bidding it good-bye; and to kiss a ring on a lady's hand and nothing but the ring is a difficult task.

Marcia had no ring to give him in return. Things at times have a habit of going awkwardly. The diamond, of course, must not be taken off again, and under it lay her only other ornament, her mother's engaged ring.

"I cannot give you this," she said, touching it. "I am not going to take off the diamond, as that would be unlucky. Besides," she added, with a laugh that was earnest—for it is quite possible to laugh earnestly—"the ring you have given me was your mother's, and the little gold hoop was all that my own mother wore except her wedding-ring for many years."

Douglas laughed merrily. "We must not spoil luck," he said, and he kissed her hand again.

"But," continued Marcia, "I will send you a present, such as it is, before you leave the house," and then she drew herself up to her full height, held out her hand, and said, "I am going now, and you may write to me both here and at Sloane Street."

There are matter-of-fact elements in all incidents of life, and even after what had passed between them, it was a matter-of-fact and mechanical kind of thing for Douglas to open the door and bow once again over Marcia's hand as she passed out.

Next, what did he do? Being an Englishman, he walked to the fire and stirred it vigorously. Then he planted himself on the hearth-rug with his back to the mantelpiece. Did he think? Yes, he did; and it was of nothing in particular, for he was too happy and, indeed, self-satisfied to think definitely. It is a singular thing that men seem to concentrate their ideas when they plant themselves on the hearth-rug, in its very centre, with their back to the fire. There is a philosophy in these

things. Why does a man fold his arms when he has made up his mind? Why does he beat the devil's tattoo when he cannot quite make up his mind? Why does he look up when he is thinking of the future, and on the ground when he is thinking of the past?

There must be a reason for all these things. They are relics of our long-forgotten ancestry, and the act is unconscious on our own part—as unconscious as that of the dog who turns round three or four times before he finally lies down to sleep, and then the moment he has lain down heaves his chest and blows an immense respiration through his nostrils. His ancestors used to make themselves a little lair for the night on the grass or brushwood, and used to clear their nostrils with a deep blow, that even while asleep they might scent the advent of a possible enemy. Look at Mr. Darwin's learned remarks on the descent of man, and you will find it explained why, when a man gets into a passion, he draws back his lips and shows all his teeth.

John Douglas was still warming himself in this attitude when the expected telegram from his faithful clerk reached him. Blessed is the barrister's clerk that lieth for his master. Verily he shall not be disappointed of his reward when they say unto that master, "Learned brother, sit up higher."

Thus ran the mendacious missive—"From Henry Jenkinson, Temple. To John Douglas, Esquire, St. Austell Towers, Oakshire. Consultation fixed specially. Attorney General's to-morrow. Special fee. Bedford Level improvements. Cookson, Goldsworthy. View next day if possible."

Here was a happy way out of difficulties. Douglas dashed upstairs, packed his portmanteau, saw Lady St. Austell, and let the telegram speak for itself, wrote a letter to Lord St. Austell, and was soon on his way to the station.

"One more or less will not be missed in so big a house," he reflected. And then he lit a cigar.

When he had fairly gone, the servants wondered among themselves at his liberality. For there is honour of their own among servants, and you may safely trust your gratuities in a lump sum to one who is in authority among them.

In the train Douglas read the papers, for he had not the facts of the great Bedford Level case as yet before him, nor indeed was he ever likely to be troubled with them. Nor have I anything now to add except that he dined that evening at his club, and wrote a letter to Marcia, thanking her for the presents which he had received before he left the house. They were a small enamelled locket, and her own photograph with her signature.

I suppose there ought also to have been a lock of her hair, but for this he had not asked, and so she had not sent it. Perhaps he ought to have remembered to ask, only one forgets lesser matters on great and hurried occasions.

There are some things which men will never know about women, or women about men, and about these things there are pretty and almost pious fictions. Douglas ought, according to all rules, from those of chivalry down to our own day, to have lain awake all night thinking of Marcia. I have no hesitation in saying that he did nothing of the sort. He was not exactly in the humour for a theatre, but he played a game or two of bridge at his club, and then went to bed and to sleep in the most matter-of-fact manner possible.

As for the great Bedford Level case, Lady St. Austell had forgotten its very name within a quarter of an hour, so he was never troubled afterwards with any awkward inquiries. But I think Mr. Jenkinson deserved credit for his ingenuity; and I have no doubt that if the Bedford

Level or any other level had led to litigation, either litigant might have done worse than to have sent Douglas a heavy brief, with the pleasant subscription to his name, "With you Mr. Edmondson Lynch, K.C., Mr. Joshua Jawkins, K.C., and Mr. Tugwell."

CHAPTER X

MARCIA, when she left John Douglas, was crossing the hall with the intention of making her way to her own room and thinking. Edgar Allan Poe has gone so far as to say that you can always think best in the dark. You certainly can think best when you are alone, and I will positively defy any man to think if he knows that his meditations may be at any moment interrupted. This is why some wicked people find it so easy to think in church when the sermon has begun and the preacher has fairly settled down into his stride.

Marcia had almost gained the foot of the stairs when she encountered her estimable parent, who at once assumed his choicest air of affectionate sorrow. And I must say, in justice to Sir Hugo, that he was really on this occasion extremely grieved and pained. He had the misty idea I have before referred to, that he had been making great sacrifices for Marcia's welfare, that he had somehow devoted the best years of his life to her, and that the only return he had met was base ingratitude. Had he ever been compelled to earn a living, I think Sir Hugo would have made a very good first old gentleman, and there was now about him almost a touch of King Lear. He settled his features into an appropriate sadness, and there was something like a quiver in his voice, as if the words hung in his throat.

"Marcia," he said, "I wish you would put on your things and come for a little walk with me. The sun is tempting, and I feel a walk might do me good. Besides, my dear, I wish to speak to you."

Marcia, knowing perfectly well what was about to come, betrayed no symptom of emotion of any kind, not even of curiosity.

"Certainly, papa; I will get ready at once. Will you meet me here?"

"Very well, my dear. I will be here, let us say, in five minutes. You, I dare say, will be a little longer."

"I will hurry, papa," and Marcia ran upstairs; while Sir Hugo braced his nerves for what he knew would be the most awkward encounter of all with some French brandy, neat, for once, and wrapped himself up with the greatest care, as if he knew how precious was his own life to the world at large, and was determined not to run the slightest risk of even a cold.

His preparations were hardly completed when his daughter joined him in the hall, with a look in her eyes that distinctly said, "Gentlemen of the guard, fire first!" and entirely threw Sir Hugo off his balance.

"I hear, my dear child," he said, as they found themselves on the gravel side by side, "I hear with considerable astonishment from Mr. Douglas—a young man, I believe, of some ability, and I may even say promise—that you have consented to marry him, subject, I presume, to my approval."

"He asked me to marry him, papa, and I wished him to speak to you. He has told me what passed between you, and we are now going to wait until I am of age."

Sir Hugo did not exactly know how to meet this kind of answer. He was in much the position of a man who, having demanded an apology in the certainty of at once getting it, is told to go to a place not generally named and to get it there. What is a man to do with his own daughter when she distinctly lets him know that she is not afraid of him, and does not intend to obey him?

Perhaps Sir Hugo did the best thing under all the

circumstances. He blew his nose, with a tinge of pathos in the performance.

"My dear child," he said (and this was stagey and unwise; it was the very last kind of tack on which he should have started with Marcia), "my dear child, I confess I am deeply grieved and wounded. I have been, Marcia, a loving and tender parent to you. Since your dear mother's death you have been my one and only thought and care, and I confess that I expected some return from you for all my devotion—some other return than ingratitude." And the man at this point gave way to the father, for the excellent old gentleman very nearly broke down.

Marcia remained silent, which was very annoying. Her father, of course, would have liked a scene, and in fact wanted it. There was much in his nature of a certain type of feminine cunning, and he had an idea that out of a real good scene he should come with flying colours. Evidently, however, there was not to be a scene, so he turned on the tremolo stop again.

"I am getting old, Marcia. Time is telling on me. I may be summoned at any moment." (His look of resignation to the decrees of Providence was inimitable.) "Life has little left for me, and my years will not be many. I promised your dearest mother that I would watch over you, and do my best to make up for the irreparable loss that fell upon you by her death. Day and night, early and late, I have had your welfare constantly in my mind. And I should be neglecting the most sacred of all duties if I did not make it the one object of my solicitude to see your future secured by a suitable marriage. I think, Marcia, I have a right to expect that in this most important matter of all you should not have acted without my approval or even my consent."

Marcia's answer was very short, and, like many short answers, was all the more effective.

"My dear papa," she said, "this is a matter in which I surely have the first right to an opinion. If I am to marry, I shall be giving the whole of what is left of my life. My own life is as serious a matter to me as it can possibly be to you. And I cannot see why you should object to a marriage which would at once relieve you of all responsibility so far as I am concerned, and enable you to live as you have hitherto done, almost without being aware of my existence."

Now here Sir Hugo was puzzled. If he had been a man with any courage in him he would have told Marcia at once to go about her business, and would have taken the whole matter into his own hands. But selfish men are always cowards. They are haunted by the idea that they will have to do something, or to give something.

The story of Iphigenia comes down to our own day, only that fathers do not stab their own daughters with a butcher's knife. Otherwise, all the rest is true. Sir Hugo could not have stabbed any living thing. The mere sight of blood, or even the smell of it, would have unhinged him for at least a fortnight. But he was none the less resolute in having his own way. It is curious how many men mislead themselves.

A man who has made his living for some years over the billard-table discovers that his wife has musical ability, and it at once occurs to him that she ought to go upon the Music Hall stage, and to earn an income sufficient to support the entire family. Nor is this mistaken point of view confined to men. I have known men—a man, let me say—whose wife has shaken him up in the morning by the collar of his nightgown, and yelled in his ears, "Why do you not get up? Why do you not write poetry like Lord Byron, or a history like Gibbon? Why do you not write a play like 'Our Boys,' or 'The Private Secretary,' or 'The Candidate?' Why do you not——?" It is really too pitiful to follow this kind of argument.

But Sir Hugo, unhappily, had made up his mind that Marcia's marriage was to be for his special and particular benefit. It is unpleasant to study morbid anatomy. It is equally unpleasant to follow the reasoning of a thoroughly selfish man. But Sir Hugo's reasoning was of this kind.

"I have treasured the girl as the apple of my eye since her mother's death. I have been the best, the most kind, the most generous, and the most indulgent of fathers. I have sacrificed my life for her." Now this was most entirely and strictly untrue. For Sir Hugo had all the vices which were possible for a man of his age, and indulged in them, not without an air of resignation, as if he considered that he was by his brilliant example keeping younger men out of mischief, and teaching them to know the ropes. You would find him in places commonly considered dangerous, or, to say the least, not quite reputable. His first words with you allayed your suspicions.

"Odd it is how little these places alter. It is just as I remember it thirty years ago. But it is tiresome. Let us have a brandy and soda. Not here, for Heaven's sake. Let us go to the Club."

These remarks usually got rid of the person to whom they were addressed. Sir Hugo was of course very well known about London. But is it not a fact, that if a man is six feet in height, with grey hair and a moustache to match, if he dresses well, if he is always absolutely sober, if he pays his bets, and if he is not suspected of sharp play, either at cards or billiards, he is, as a rule, accepted as the ideal of an English gentleman? Should he spend a couple of guineas on his supper, no man asks whether his wife and children are starving on bread and butter in Pentonville. Were I to write a learned book on success in life—success inspired by no lofty motives—I should lay down for a young man the following rules:

1. Never forget a friend or forgive an enemy.

2. Never let anybody know anything about you, unless you can turn the confidence to your own advantage.

3. Always live well and dress well. But dine off a crust sooner than have a spot of grease on your hat.

4. Never make any place too hot to hold you. Always let is be possible for you to come back, pay up, and take your old position.

5. Recollect that the older you grow the wiser you become, and the more venerable you look. If a man has a venerable look, and also knows the world as a wild-fowler knows his marshes, he will find the supply of fools infinite.

6. Fools are like wild fowl. They have too much feather on them, and have never heard of decoys or of goose-shot.

These are a more or less complete set of commandments, although no doubt judicious additions might easily be made to them. There is a much simpler rule of life suitable for the smallest boy. Never tell a lie. Never take a blow. Never prig.

A boy needs no bigger catechism than this. As he becomes older his relations with the world become more complex, and his responsibilities more onerous.

Captain Cuttle used to observe that the bearings of an observation lay in the application of it. Blows are out of the question for a lady. Prigging was out of all question for Marcia. Her sole duty under this table of three commandments was to tell the truth. This was a duty she could undertake fearlessly. It would save an immense amount of trouble in this very troublesome world if people would only tell the truth. A falsehood serves your purpose for the minute, but it comes back to you ten years afterwards with infinite punishment in its train. Truth is very cheap and very short. Also it entails no strain on the imagination.

Now Marcia had told her father the exact truth with regard to her relations with Douglas—neither above it, below it, before it, nor behind it. There are some people who are constitutionally incapable of a lie. They simply cannot tell it. Marcia was one of these.

I have thus indicated the various points of view taken by Sir Hugo and Marcia of what really ought to have been a very simple question. It would have been the simplest question in the world if Sir Hugo had not complicated it by his own selfishness, and aggravated his selfishness by pretending that it was paternal solicitude. Let me sum up the points as they are at present at issue.

Sir Hugo wants his daughter to marry a man with a large house and many servants, where he can live as a pensioner without causing sufficient friction to make the suggestion possible that his visit has been unduly protracted. I really believe that if you say as little and do as little as possible, except at the right time and to the right persons—if, that is to say, you do not put yourself *en évidence*—you can stay in a big house, if you have a shadow of a claim upon its owner, for almost as long as you please.

There are artifices over this stratagem. You must have breakfast in bed, and limit it to toast and cocoa. You must look in at lunch towards its finish. You must take especial care to make yourself conversationally useful at dinner. For to be useful is a more humble task than to be brilliant, or even ornamental. The highest gift you can possess is that of gliding into the conversation and diverting it into a channel which permits everybody to talk. You yourself need then only nod approval. This, however, is a very rare accomplishment. The rarest of all is that of talking up to the biggest man at the table, and coaxing him into expansion, until he tells you, all of

you, how he was flogged at Eton. Few men have the tact or the nerve for this.

The second point is that Sir Hugo wants that during the remainder of his life his daughter shall not trouble him. It would be a dreadful thing, for instance, if she were to marry a government clerk or a young barrister, and her husband were to die, and she were to come back to him with a couple of children. Sir Hugo hated children of all sorts, looking on them as things that get in your way, and divert women from attentions to which you are entirely and indefeasibly entitled. And he would have hated unprovided-for descendants most of all.

The third and last point is that Sir Hugo, having cherished and nurtured the seed of hope planted in his bosom by Lady St. Austell, has determined that, *per fas aut nefas*, his daughter shall marry one or other of those eligible young men—Lord Norwich or Mr. Davidson.

Marcia, on her part, has equally made up *her* mind to marry John Douglas. Nothing shall come between them, she is firmly resolved. This young woman came to St. Austell Towers perfectly heart-whole. She met Douglas as I have described, and liking him from the first, soon had her heart filled with a warmer feeling, which the present difficulties with which the two are threatened have only served to increase. She is quite prepared for the worst, which after all cannot be very terrible, for she stands in no fear of her father, and will decline in a most uncompromising manner to be bullied into compliance with his wishes.

"My dear child," said Sir Hugo, after receiving Marcia's home-thrust, "if you will be good enough to abstain from being rude, and to listen to me for five minutes, I think that we shall probably come to the conclusion that we have been of the same mind after all. I can quite understand your finding Sloane Street dull, and becoming tired of the society of the Fräulein, and wanting

to *ranger* yourself in life, and so accepting the first decent offer. I have not the faintest objection to your marrying. In fact, it is the only thing for you to do. But what I do object to, and most strongly, is that you should throw yourself away upon the first comer, when with your beauty and my influence you might command the most brilliant marriage.''

"I love Mr. Douglas, papa, and I shall marry him.''

"Great heavens! grant me patience!'' gasped Sir Hugo. "Are you aware that there are at present two millionaires in the house, either of whom you can have for the asking? Lady St. Austell is my informant. I need not say that she could have no object in deceiving me.''

"I am not aware of the fact, papa; and if even it were so, I have promised Mr. Douglas that I will marry him, and I shall keep my word.''

"I believe you have gone mad, Marcia. At any rate you will soon drive me so. Listen for one minute. There is young Norwich head over ears in love with you. Every one can see it. He may propose at any moment; at least, if he does not hear of this tomfoolery with Douglas. And if you prefer it, there is Mr. Davidson the ironmaster, who would—Lady St. Austell, mark you, is my authority, and she takes a most motherly interest in you—be only too charmed to marry you, and settle a hundred and fifty thousand pounds upon you into the bargain. And with chances like these, and brilliant prospects like these, you propose to throw yourself away upon an adventurer like Douglas.''

"Mr. Douglas is no adventurer, papa. You would not dare to tell him so to his face. Why do so behind his back? I told Lady St. Austell, or at least let her clearly understand, that I could never look upon Lord Norwich in any other light than that of a friend. I could never become really attached to him. And as for Mr. Davidson, I have not spoken half a dozen words to him. I am not

to be bought and sold to suit your convenience, papa, or the convenience of any one else. I have made my mind up, and I tell you, for once and for all, that it is utterly useless to attempt to shake my resolve."

"If you are insane enough to abandon such a future as I have mapped for you for such a shabby existence as you contemplate I have no argument left to use. I shall, however, ask Lady St. Austell to reason with you. She may possibly have more weight with you than I. At all events, you will not be able to accuse her of self-interest. I am very hurt at your wicked and unfeeling conduct, and also at your cruel and unjust insinuations with regard to myself. Now, if you please, we will return home."

"Very well, papa; just as you like."

People may say that Marcia did not do her duty as a daughter. They may add that she was ignorant of the world. I venture to differ from them on both points.

In the first place, Marcia's marriage was a thing that, as she said, concerned herself more than her father. Sir Hugo had no right to entangle it in an undercurrent of ways and means leading to his own comfort.

A girl is not bound to marry an oyster merchant to whom she objects because her father is fond of oysters and is anxious to get them at trade price, or even for nothing. And I for one can see no difference between oysters and other lesser ends to which selfishness looks. It may be oysters, or good claret, or anything else. Anyhow, Sir Hugo wanted to sell his daughter that he might live more luxuriously, and, in fact, after his own ideas of comfort. And this was very wicked on the part of Sir Hugo; it was also very unchristian; it was worse than very unchristian, for it was very selfish; it was worse than selfish, for it was almost ungentlemanly. Even Jephthah did not propose to sell his daughter for a daily mess of potage.

But Sir Hugo felt that he was getting older. He had

lived in London all his life; he had never really felt the wholesome stimulus of family affection. There are many such men. It is idle to attempt to bring them to a sense of their duty. "Sir," said a billiard-marker once to the writer of these pages, naming a man pretty well known at the time in London society, "if you were to kick that gentleman down a passage a mile long in which there wasn't room for him to turn round, I don't believe that he could run straight."

It was Sir Hugo's chief fault that he could not run straight.

CHAPTER XI

THE first thing that Sir Hugo did after luncheon was to secure a *tête-à-tête* with Lady St. Austell, into whose sympathetic ears the thwarted parent poured a recital of all his woes. I say "sympathetic," because although her ladyship did not entirely agree with the view that Sir Hugo took of the matter, nevertheless, having promised to assist in the matrimonial campaign, and having indeed commenced operations already, she felt more than a kindly interest in the result.

And, as I have already hinted, Lady St. Austell liked Sir Hugo. She had in reality only seen the best side of him, and recollected what he was in the old days before he left the army, and when she herself was within an ace of becoming Lady Conyers. Of the real Sir Hugo she had not an idea. On the contrary, she gave him credit for absolute disinterestedness with regard to his daughter's future, and believed that he was actuated by the best and sincerest motives.

"I will speak to her to-morrow," said Lady St. Austell. "After all, if she insists on marrying Mr. Douglas it is not such a bad match. He is very clever and steady, and is sure to get on. His family is an excellent one. St. Austell has known them all his life, and was a great friend of Mr. Douglas' father."

"All this is no doubt true, dear Lady St. Austell. But I should question whether Mr. Douglas has a farthing more than he earns. These young barristers are all alike. What settlements could he make? None, of course. It would be a most precarious marriage, and it would be

positively wicked on my part to sanction it or countenance it in any way. I couldn't do it, indeed I could not."

"Very well, Sir Hugo, there is something in what you say, and I will talk to Marcia. But I warn you that young ladies of the present day have an awkward habit of making up their minds for themselves, and if she is really in love I much doubt whether I shall have any success."

"It's an awful responsibility," said Sir Hugo. "But nothing will make me swerve from my manifest duty."

The next morning after breakfast Lady St. Austell invited Marcia to come to her boudoir. "I dare say, my dear child, you will guess why I want to speak to you."

"Yes, I think I know, Lady St. Austell."

"Now, Marcia," said her ladyship after they had sat down, "I have promised your papa to have a little talk with you. You see, my child, you necessarily know very little of the world, and you have no mother to advise you. So if you will let me, I will try and supply her place, and will act towards you as if you were my own."

Now Lady St. Austell, to do her justice, was perfectly sincere in all this, and her manner of saying it convinced Marcia of the fact, so that a feeling of affection and gratitude sprang up in the girl's heart.

"Thank you, Lady St. Austell, I know you are my friend. I will listen to everything you say."

"That's right, dear. Your papa tells me that you have engaged yourself to Mr. Douglas who was staying here. I suppose that this is the case."

"Yes, Lady St. Austell."

"I fear, dear, that neither of you have been very prudent. You see, Mr. Douglas has no fortune. He is a most estimable man; I wish a few more of the present generation were like him. But he has little or nothing but that for which he works. Suppose that he were to fall ill, and his income thereby cease. What would you

both do? You see he is too young to have had time to save any money. You have none, and your papa could allow you little or nothing."

"I should not mind roughing it," said Marcia.

"No, my dear, perhaps not. But marriages such as the one you are contemplating often end in something worse than roughing it. Believe me, that when the pinch comes, as it too often does, love flies away, and a feeling very like aversion takes its place. The man recognises that many of the petty troubles and annoyances which he has to bear would never have come upon him had it not been for his marriage; and the woman cannot fail to realise how much happier her life might have been had she only made a more prudent choice, and taken the advice of those who knew the world better than she. Then an estrangement takes place. It may be gradual or it may be sudden, but in any case it is certain, and thus two lives are marred."

"But Mr. Douglas seems such a sensible man. Do you think he would want me to marry him if he did not see his way clearly as to the future?"

"A man in love, my child, is little better than a fool. He never considers the consequences of what he is doing. Mr. Douglas is in all ordinary affairs a most sensible and keen-witted young man. But the fact is, your beauty has turned his head, and he is proposing to do the most foolish thing in the world, both with regard to his interest and your own."

"I shouldn't like Mr. Douglas to injure his future for my sake," said Marcia.

"I am sure of that, dear. No good-hearted or proper-minded girl could wish that."

"I like Mr. Douglas very much. I never liked any one so much before, and the prospect of being his wife has made me happier than I have been for a long time. But I would give all this up if you are certain of what

you say, dear Lady St. Austell. I will be quite frank with you. I would not do this for my father's sake. I would only do it for Mr. Douglas' own sake."

"You are taking a very sensible and proper view of the matter, Marcia. If I was conscientiously able to further this marriage I would do so, and that too in spite of your father's objections, if I thought they were wrong or unfounded. But for both your sakes I cannot do this. And I strongly advise you to write to Mr. Douglas and tell him what conclusion you have arrived at. Or, if you prefer it, I will do so for you. What do you say, Marcia?"

"Very well, Lady St. Austell, you write, please," replied Marcia, bursting into tears and hurrying from the room.

"I don't like this," said Lady St. Austell to herself. "But I suppose Sir Hugo was right. After all, it would have been a most imprudent marriage. And I am certain that Norwich will propose to her. But I never thought I should manage her so easily. I wonder whether she is really in love with Douglas. I do indeed."

* * * * *

"*St. Austell Towers.*
October 22nd, 19—.

"DEAR MR. DOUGLAS,

"I never felt greater difficulty in commencing a letter, although what I have to say is after all very plain.

"To come to the point at once, Sir Hugo Conyers has told me of your engagement to his daughter, and of his strong disapproval of such a step. Now, dear Mr. Douglas, I will be perfectly frank with you, and I must say at once that I think Sir Hugo is right. Lord St. Austell and I have the very highest opinion of you, and I have not hesitated to express our feelings towards you in discussing this matter with Sir Hugo. But you have no fortune, and you are entirely dependent on your profession for your income. Marcia Conyers is a portionless girl, and it would

be, in my opinion, the height of imprudence for any two young people to marry under such circumstances.

"I have told Marcia this, and I now repeat it to you. In the advice I have given Marcia, who has no mother of her own to consult, I have considered you quite as much as her.

"And I must now tell you that Marcia, in spite of her evidently strong attachment to you, sees things in this light, and has commissioned me to write to you, and beg you to consider everything at an end. Believe me, my dear friend, it is best that it should be so.

"Lord St. Austell and I take the greatest interest in your career, and we shall both be glad to hear good news of you, and to see you here whenever you can find time to run away from town.

"With kindest regards, believe me,

"Your sincere friend,

"EMILY ST. AUSTELL.

"P.S. Marcia has just sent me your ring, which she has begged me to return. You will receive it by the same post as this letter."

"My dearest Marcia," said Sir Hugo to his daughter the next day, "Lady St. Austell has been telling me of your sensible conduct. You now see, my dear, that in refusing to sanction your marriage with Mr. Douglas I was only acting in your interest, and——"

"Papa, if you wish me to retain one spark of affection for you, you will not speak to me again on this subject. And what is more, I decline to discuss it with you."

"Very well, my dear," replied Sir Hugo, perfectly satisfied at having gained his point, "we will say no more about it. After all, I dare say that you are right. Will you come for a little stroll? No? So sorry. It is a lovely morning, and the birds are singing, and the sun is shining, and all nature seems to be joyful and full of con-

tentment. A wonderful thing nature! When you have children of your own, you will know what it is. Go and enjoy yourself, my darling; you are looking a little paler than I altogether like. Dear me, how like your mother you are getting. It is positively wonderful! Good-bye, my sweet, good-bye."

And good Sir Hugo somehow gravitated again towards the billiard-room. Curaçoa such as that to be had at The Towers was beyond his reach in London.

Marcia for her part chose some stout boots, a long thick cloak, a hat of the kind known as "the deer-stalker," and a somewhat uncompromising umbrella, and sallied out into the air. It was a crisp, cheery day; the ground rang pleasantly under her feet, and the blood began to move in her veins and bring the colour to her cheeks. All the manly element in her nature seemed to assert itself. For a strong nature there is a positive pleasure in defying and facing the worst troubles.

She had not gone far before she became aware of the approach of Lord Norwich, who it is charitably to be hoped had been told in which direction to find her. On any other assumption the hopeless bewilderment of this young man would have been ludicrous. His lordship blundered into conversation much in the fashion of a fairly good skater making his first fifty or hundred strokes after half a dozen blank winters. He remarked that it was cold, and safely added that there was always good snipe-shooting in cold weather, a fact of which Marcia was not aware. From snipe he diverged to figure-skating, and finding that Marcia could not execute the outside edge backwards, expressed his opinion that she ought to make herself mistress of that accomplishment, which he explained only required nerve. In Canada the ladies acquired it while young, and were absolutely perfect in it.

Marcia expressed a regret more or less sincere at her inability to achieve the outside edge either forward or

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backwards, and her readiness to study it upon the first opportunity.

His lordship next ascertained that she was fond of horses, but could neither drive nor ride. And ultimately, having exhausted these and some other similar topics of interest, he expressed his emphatic conviction, with all his schoolboy good-nature, that it was "a shame" for her to be unequal to these things, which were all useful and extremely pleasant, and needed nothing more for their acquisition than practice combined with the necessary determination.

It was impossible to be angry with this young man; his good-nature was as evident as his sincerity. He amused Marcia, and to a certain extent pleased her, for she was quite sufficiently human to enjoy a sincere compliment.

And so Lord Norwich, in sporting phraseology, warmed up and settled down into his stride. He should like, he told Marcia, above all things to have the high pleasure of being her tutor in the various accomplishments that they had discussed, and more particularly in the art of tandem driving, which he explained was to all other forms of driving what tennis is to other games with ball, and as far superior to four-in-hand as is billiards to bagatelle. And having thus stood for a minute or two on the bank, Lord Norwich boldly took his header.

"I'm not a good hand at saying what I mean, Miss Conyers," he began. "Talking is one of the things they leave out in our education. But what I want to say, if you will allow me, is, that you would make me the proudest and happiest man in the world if you would take me as you find me. I would do every mortal thing I could to make you happy. I won't talk about gratifying all your wishes. That goes, of course. But I would do anything and everything to show you how sincere I am in what I am saying. And I would live where you liked—in London, or in the country, or abroad; and perhaps, if there is any

place you particularly liked, you wouldn't mind choosing a house there, or having one built to your own fancy, and having it for your own, to go to whenever you pleased, or wanted to be quiet. One does not always care for visitors, and I think all ladies like some sort of hermitage of their own. I know my mother did. And ''—he laughed—" my father never dared so much as pass the lodge gates without her permission.''

Here at last was the nettle to be grasped. Marcia laid hold of it firmly.

She waited a minute or two, and then said, " All this is very kind of you, Lord Norwich—kinder still because I am sure you mean it. I had better be quite frank with you. It is always best to tell the truth. I cannot possibly do as you ask, for the very best of reasons. I am engaged to nobody else; but there is some one of whom I have been very fond, although I shall never marry him. I could not honestly marry any other man. That is all, Lord Norwich. Let us forget this morning, and let us always be the best of friends. I do not mind telling you '' —and here her voice rang pleasantly—" that I should like to always reckon you among my few friends.''

Lord Norwich, in an account of this interview to his dearest and closest old friend and brother officer, emphatically declared that the young lady completely " bottled '' him. The phrase may not be exactly an elegant one, but its native simplicity is complete.

What ought a nobleman and ex-guardsman to say when he is completely " bottled ''? Pretty much, I suppose, what Lord Norwich did. He told Marcia he was honoured by her confidence, and would respect it. He expressed a hope that she might perhaps change her determination, and said something simple and to the point about his own resolve to wait. He would wait for her, he told her, for years, and in the interval he supposed they would meet occasionally. And then, being a sensible young man, he

said nothing more, but began to talk about what may be best described as "anything."

With commendable adroitness he allowed Marcia to pick the way, and somehow the way led them back to the house, at which when they arrived they were really upon most excellent terms with one another. Why should they not have been? Lord Norwich was one of the best and most warm-hearted of young men, and Marcia felt this. Marcia herself had been straightforward, and Lord Norwich respected her for it. How very much easier and happier life would become at once if we would only tell each other the exact truth, as these two young people had just done.

What was now the result of the whole thing? A marriage prevented which might possibly have been wearisome, and if so, certainly unhappy, and instead of it a firm and honest friendship cemented. For a good man the friendship of a good woman, and for a good woman the friendship of a good man is invaluable. It is one of the few things in this life worth having.

So both Marcia and Lord Norwich thought and felt as they shook hands heartily under the portico before passing into the hall.

CHAPTER XII

On receiving and reading Lady St. Austell's letter—he read it carefully two or three times—Douglas put the document into his pocket, lit a cigar, and walked leisurely to his Club by way of the Embankment.

At the Club he wrote a couple of letters, each very brief and pronouncedly businesslike. One was to Lady St. Austell, the other to Marcia. That to Lady St. Austell was little more than an acknowledgment of her letter to himself, concluding with the interesting information that he was now once again hard at work, for which his visit to St. Austell Towers had made him fully fit, and in fact almost impatient. That to Marcia was, as lawyers used to say, *in hac verbâ*.

"*Oxford and Cambridge Club,*
"*October* 30*th*, 19—.

"Dear Miss Conyers,

"You are of course aware that I have heard from Lady St. Austell. Pray consider yourself perfectly and entirely free from any kind of pledge or promise you may ever have given me.

"It is only due to myself to state that I am not an adventurer, and could have sufficiently provided both for your present and for any possible future. This, I hope, you will believe, or if you doubt it, you can easily satisfy yourself when you return to London.

"I once had your good opinion, and I should not like you to think that I was altogether unworthy of it.

"Yours sincerely,
"John Douglas."

These letters finished and posted, Mr. Douglas, having nothing else to do, strolled round to some very well-known livery-stables in Piccadilly, where (I had forgotten to mention the fact) he kept his horse. A brisk trot to Richmond with a canter in the Park will fit you admirably afterwards for a plain dinner, not at the Star and Garter, which is practically closed, but a certain good old-fashioned house down in the town, where you can get a beef-steak with mashed potatoes and onions and a pickled walnut, with a bottle of sound port and a good cigar.

John Douglas was a simple man, liking old-fashioned houses and good plain cookery. This is the true stoic philosophy, the net outcome of which is that those, after all, who expect the least in the world go the certain way to get the most.

And then, after a few compliments exchanged with the host, Douglas let out his stirrup-leathers a couple of holes, and jogged back to town at that most delightful of all paces to any man who can ride—a steady covert trot. All of which things may seem prosaic, and no doubt are, but ninety-nine per cent. of life is prose of the most substantial and unvarnished kind. And it is fortunate for us that this should be the case. Else a man with any brains would at once flare down in the socket as a taper does when we plunge it into a jar of oxygen.

When Douglas found himself again in his chambers he began to think over things. This was only natural, and in no way a symptom of weakness. He had been harder hit than he cared to own even to himself, although of course the whole thing was now over. And he had been insulted into the bargain by the veriest old Polonius that ever trod the boards of real life—only that Polonius was merely an old driveller, well-meaning in his stupid way, and wholly unselfish. Now no one could say as much as this in favour of Sir Hugo. And, into the bargain, he had been patronised—a thing that no man likes

at any time, and is doubly irritating when the patronage is absolutely uncalled for and offered with superflous fuss and rustle of condescension.

And, as all these things recurred to him, he in his own mind heartily and emphatically cursed the whole business from beginning to end, and vowed with great fervour that he would never again make such a fool of himself.

This, of course, was wholly unnecessary, as he had not made a fool of himself at all. There is all the difference in the world between making a fool of yourself and being fooled by other people. The last is a thing that may happen to the strongest of men, especially if he be of a generous disposition.

He thus then, as it were, drew a heavy line down these pages of his diary, to show that they were finally settled and done with, and so closed the book with what in metaphor I will call a slam.

After all, the best and the fullest portion of his life was still before him, and there was no reason upon earth why he should not use it wisely and enjoy it thoroughly. There were no skeletons in his cupboard, and if a man without a skeleton in his cupboard cannot live happily and add to the happiness of other people, there must be some extraordinary defect in his constitution.

There being no such defect in the constitution of John Douglas, he, in a matter-of-fact way worthy of the oldest coasting skipper that ever yet trod deck, turned in, and was almost immediately wrapped in that sound sleep which we are taught to believe is the peculiar privilege of the just.

* * * * *

At St. Austell Towers his letters produced very much the effect he had intended they should.

Sir Hugo was glad that the thing was over, a result which he put down entirely to his own diplomacy, and upon which he proportionately plumed himself. Lady

St. Austell was not a little nettled, but disposed in a friendly way to make allowances. She could not get it out of her head that both Douglas and Marcia were very young people who were all the better for a little sound advice given at the proper moment, and in a friendly manner.

There was once a benevolent old Scotch dame who expressed her conviction of the devil that he would be "nae the waur for a guid talking to." In a similar spirit of broad philanthropy her ladyship felt that Douglas had had his "talking to," and entertained a firm hope that it had done him good.

Marcia, with all her strength, was fairly broken down; and I do not know that I can add anything to these two words by any sort of expansion. All she could see before her was a life as dull and wearisome as the past, and with nothing in it like the little pleasures of her childhood and girlhood under the genial Fräulein to relieve its horrible monotony.

This is a crooked world, in which things go crookedly and perversely. Had there been at St. Austell Towers a single person with any observation, common sense, and moral courage—any one of such genuine metal as that grand old lady, Miss Betsy Trotwood—and who would have acted as Marcia's friend, this miserable tangle would have been seen and cut through. Mrs. Jane Pontifex with her own "flap-doodle and fudge" would have settled it in a moment. Half, and more than half, the unpleasantness in this world is due to moral cowardice.

But the wretched Sir Hugo was not yet out of his troubles. The full extent of his misery was still unknown to him. I think if ever any person in this world got something like a share of the punishment he deserved, it was that estimable father when Lady St. Austell had to break to him the terrible intelligence that Marcia had actually so far forgotten her duty, and everything else

which a right-minded young woman ought to hold most sacred, as to positively refuse the coronet which that really excellent and genial young man, Lord Norwich, had laid at her feet.

At first he refused altogether to believe the thing. It was too monstrous. It was out of the question. Then when he found that he had got to believe it, he worked himself into a passion which would have brought a man of less methodical and temperate habits dangerously near the verge of apoplexy.

He felt that he should like to shake Marcia, and lock her up in her room, and feed her upon bread of affliction and water of affliction for a good week or so.

He almost lamented that even stronger measures were not possible. Besides, he could not help seeing that he was left in an awkward position as towards Lord Norwich himself. Lord Norwich, he argued, would think that he had been made a fool of, and would be correspondingly angry.

Now to such men as Sir Hugo the anger of a peer in the position of Lord Norwich is something more than a serious thing. It is a very terrible matter indeed. It may ruin him for life, or for so much of life as he has left.

Sir Hugo, after all, was very ignorant of the world as it now is—as ignorant indeed as was that most profound scholar, Dean Gaisford of Christ Church.

There came one day to Dean Gaisford, a young man who had taken a double first, and who informed the learned editor of Suidas (a most uncommonly useless author) that he intended to resign his tutorship and to go to the Bar.

"To go to London," said the Dean doubtfully. "And how, sir, do you propose to succeed in London?"

The young man thus brought to book replied modestly that he had a small income, and he hoped reasonably fair abilities. The Dean laughed in his face. "Go to London if you like, sir," he said. "Of course I cannot stop you.

But take my advice. Never mind your abilities, but attach yourself, if you can, to some person of position, and make yourself useful to him."

Perhaps the Dean in those days was not altogether wrong. He would most certainly be wrong now, when hardly a minister except the Lord Chancellor has any patronage at his disposal, and even that most august of State officials dare hardly perpetrate a downright job lest the profession should prove too strong for him.

Patronage has now practically become a public trust, and its exercise is jealously scrutinised even in that most Conservative of services—His Majesty's.

Of all this, as of much else that had been going on during the latter years of his life, Sir Hugo was seriously and profoundly ignorant, and if you had told him that without powerful private friends behind him, John Douglas would certainly become a Judge, and very possibly Lord Chief Justice, he would charitably have put the statement down to your inexperience.

Sir Hugo, accordingly, resolved to lie in wait for Lord Norwich, to bring all his diplomacy to bear upon that young gentleman, to plead all kinds of excuses for Marcia—wilfulness, bewilderment, anything you please—and so, in his own way, to bring matters to a happy issue.

First of all he had a stormy interview with his daughter, in which, I regret to say, he used unseemly and indeed almost unclubbable language. Then he extracted such final words of consolation and advice as he could from Lady St. Austell, before whom he nervously paraded himself, like some raw recruit under the inspection by a general of more than average strength of character and power of expression. Then he fortified himself, according to his usual custom, with his favourite curaçoa and brandy, and then he pulled himself together, drew himself up to his full height, and went at once in quest of Lord Norwich,

lest his courage, now fairly screwed to the sticking-point, should in any way desert him.

Lord Norwich was easily found, and received Sir Hugo most courteously. He knew him to be a worthless, selfish man, and felt an almost pitying contempt for the game, which his common sense had now thoroughly seen through.

But he was too much a gentleman to show anything of this to a man so much older than himself, and who happened also to be Marcia's father. So he received Sir Hugo, and listened to what he had to say, with every courtesy. Sir Hugo, of course, made a long story of the matter, during which he managed to talk an infinite deal of nothing, until Lord Norwich, from being amused, became bored, and from being bored felt strongly disposed to let himself become angry and to show it.

He was a simple young man, as I have said, who hated to have a fuss made about himself. However, he listened patiently.

With needless prolixity and iteration, Sir Hugo set out that he was deeply distressed and humiliated; that he had never been so distressed before in his life; that he could only ascribe his daughter's extraordinary conduct to caprice, and perhaps ignorance; that he had spoken to her himself very seriously, and as he hoped a father ought to speak under such astonishing circumstances; that Lady St. Austell herself had most kindly undertaken to see Marcia and to reason with her as her own dear mother—and here out came the tear, and after it the pocket-handkerchief to chase it—would have done herself had she only been spared; that he was very unhappy, but had great faith in Lady St. Austell, who was known to Marcia as his best and oldest friend, and as almost a second mother to herself.

And having reached this point, he was pumped out and collapsed feebly. These felicitous sporting

phrases are the only ones I know in which to convey the situation.

Lord Norwich, to Sir Hugo's utter horror and dismay, took the matter quite cheerfully, and in a most practical and business-like manner.

"I assure you, Sir Hugo," he said, "that I entertain the most sincere admiration for Miss Conyers, who has treated me in this matter with the greatest straightforwardness. I am also sensible how much I owe both to Lady St. Austell and to yourself for your kind offices. But I hardly anticipate that they will end as you expect, and I almost doubt if I should be doing the right thing in again forcing myself, or even appearing to force myself, upon your daughter. She has given me the simplest and very best reasons—reasons against which nothing could be urged, and which I was absolutely bound to respect—for her decision. I regret it deeply, but for my own part I do not see how it is to be helped. My own feelings towards Miss Conyers are entirely unchanged. They are, in fact, stronger than ever. But I should be simply doing a wrong thing if I made myself a party in any way to forcing her inclinations, and I ought to add that I have no intention of doing so."

How easy it is to be honest if you have only the requisite amount of courage, and how simple a way honesty is out of every possible difficulty! The frank avowal of Lord Norwich came upon Sir Hugo with all the dash and force of a waterspout. An American backwoodsman, using his own tongue, would have termed it a "slock-dologer," and he would have been perfectly right.

Sir Hugo, however, being a man callous by this time, and not easily shamed, had no intention of being put off in this manner. Perhaps, his ready brain saw at once, the marriage might be arranged after all. Many a ship has ultimately been launched which has two or three times stuck obstinately in the stocks. Marcia no doubt

had a temper of her own. But if you bully, and pester, and bore, and cajole, and entreat a woman from morning to night, alternating between the methods, you may ultimately get your way. Anyhow, the one thing to be done, clearly, was to gain time. Sir Hugo endeavoured to diplomatise, and to tide matters over.

I will not inflict his harangue upon my readers. It was a sort of dying wriggle, and occupied so much time that before it was concluded Lord Norwich had so far forgotten the amenities of life as to sit with his hands deeply thrust into his trousers pockets, and to attentively contemplate the tips of his boots.

"Give 'em line," he afterwards explained when describing the interview. "Give 'em line. Wait till they are blown. If you interrupt them they get their second wind, and the whole thing has to be gone over again."

So Sir Hugo ran himself out a second time, and then remained more or less breathless, and evidently of opinion that there was no more to be said. This is a habit many people have when they have finished what they have got to say themselves. Lord Norwich, first waiting for some twenty or thirty seconds of courtesy, then took up his parable.

"I am young, Sir Hugo," he said, "and perhaps not very bright, but I know a thing or two. I know when a lady means what she says, and wishes you once and for all to understand that she means it. It is open to me, of course, to tell you plumply that Miss Conyers has refused me once, and that I do not intend to subject myself to the unpleasant experience of being refused again. That would be rude on my part, and it would be most unfair to Miss Conyers, who has behaved very handsomely. I have had my answer, and I have taken it, and I have no present intention of troubling Miss Conyers again. I think I said before that we parted on the best of terms, and with the best possible understanding.

Checkmate! Sir Hugo trotted out a few sentences, always feeling it due to himself, to his age, to his position in society, and to a number of other things, to have the last word. He had the last word, or rather, the last hundred or so of words, which it would have been unkind to check, and then, as accountants would say, the books were closed.

Sir Hugo "doddered" off at random. Lord Norwich went out into the open air. If there is one thing which more than another lets light upon a man's character, it is his behaviour at the very moment that the crisis is over.

When the jury returned into court with their verdict of guilty, William Palmer of Rugely, as the Judge was assuming the black cap and the warders closed round behind him in the dock—a custom with warders, lest the convict should attempt something violent or foolish—scribbled a note in pencil, and handed it down to his junior counsel.

"The riding did it."

Sir Hugo had not the strength of mind or nerve of William Palmer. He was perfectly aware that, somehow or other, the riding had done it. But he had not sufficient philosophy in him to acquiesce in the result. And his retreat from the interview was consequently not so dignified as it might have been.

Exit is the simple stage direction. But there are more modes of exit than one. And Sir Hugo, in stage parlance, did not go off as effectively as he could have wished.

CHAPTER XIII

CLEARLY there was now nothing to be done but to leave St. Austell Towers with sufficient dignity to cover a retreat. Sir Hugo needed a couple of days to recover his self-possession, and of course he took them.

When an elderly gentleman has sustained an unexpected and severe reverse, when everything he has intended and done for the best turns out a failure, and when everybody else in the world is shamefully ungrateful to him, it takes him a little time to readjust his feathers, and to recover the genuine knack of his jaunty strut. Even the best and most scientific of prizefighters is a little disconcerted when he finds himself being picked up by his second, from a good fair knock-down blow, and carefully assisted back to his bottle-holder. It is the duty, or used to be the duty, of that judicious functionary, to sponge his champion's face, to arrange his hair, or what there might be of it, to pat him on the back, to administer a stimulant, to apply soothing unguents to any particularly ugly wound, and so when time was called to "bring his man up smiling."

The luckless Sir Hugo sadly needed at this juncture a bottle-holder to bring him up smiling. It was idle, of course, to go back and pour out his sorrows to Lady St. Austell. The campaign had ended in disaster, and the only thing remaining was to make the best retreat of which the circumstances admitted.

This Sir Hugo did. I do not think that the St. Austells were particularly sorry to be rid of him, or that he himself felt at all anxious to prolong his stay. The

only two persons at all concerned in the matter were Marcia and Lady St. Austell, who had learned to like one another, and were to that extent sorry to part.

The leave-taking was consequently rather a flat affair, and I am bound to add that in the servants' hall there was a freely-expressed opinion to the effect that Sir Hugo was no gentleman. Servants in big households are apt to take a mercenary view of guests, unless the smallness or the total absence of the usual tip has been compensated by courtesy. Sir Hugo on principle was never courteous to those whom he considered his inferiors. He held that it made them unduly independent. Neither in his pecuniary dealings with them could he be accused of too profuse a generosity.

"He is a horrible old bore!" said Lord St. Austell frankly, as the carriage drove off to the station. "But he is very tough, and has not seen the last of his innings yet."

"I think life has a little soured him," said her ladyship apologetically. "He ought to have done much better, but he has somehow fallen through."

"He is at the bottom, anyhow," brutally rejoined the other, "and he can't well get much further. They tell me he is on his last legs. But he seems pretty comfortable in the sawdust, and I don't think things trouble him much. I wonder if his wife was at all like that daughter of his. If so, he must have had his old wig pulled once or twice in his life. Miss Conyers is a devilish fine girl, and it's a shame to see her life wasted in this kind of way."

"We all have our troubles," said Lady St. Austell, "and I daresay Sir Hugo has his own, like everybody else. He certainly is not as well off as he used to be, and he has now hardly anything left in life but his daughter."

"Then," replied his lordship, unsympathetically, "he takes precious little care of the little he has left, and isn't commonly thankful to Providence for it. You don't

come into the smoking-room, Emily, and so you don't know. But if there is one thing upon which all the men in this house are agreed, it is that Miss Conyers is the nicest girl they have seen for years—handsome, simple, straightforward, and just the girl to make a good man a good wife. And if there is any other thing upon which they are agreed—and we haul one another over pretty freely, I can tell you—it is that Conyers himself is a selfish old humbug, who would touch his hat to you for a sovereign if he thought nobody else saw him do it."

And there was a ring in this last sentence which gave her ladyship very distinctly to understand that the discussion might be considered as closed.

There was another conversation of a more general kind that day over the five o'clock tea. The young unmarried ladies were all extremely glad that Marcia should have gone. They had seen through her all along. The way in which she had tried to entangle poor Lord Norwich was infamous. She was getting old, no doubt, and would soon be *passée*. It had been a last desperate attempt, but at the same time it was a very poor return for all dear Lady St. Austell's kindness.

And one young lady of strong and advanced views, who had once or twice actually made a political speech from a platform, went so far as to say, with a clumsy attempt at being funny, that if there were many such young women about as Miss Conyers, we should need something like a close time for the protection of young heirs to entailed estates and large rent-rolls—an observation which, so to say, brought down the house.

It is within my knowledge that this lady herself next year led a victim to the altar in the form of the examining chaplain to the bishop of her dicoese, after several desperate attempts to capture in their proper order of succession, the archdeacon, the rural dean, and the precentor.

We have all heard the phrase, "a good old garrison

hack." But for downright spitefulness, without even the thinnest pretence of good-nature to cloak it, commend me to the elderly spinster, the Diana among the unmarried choir, in an old-fashioned cathedral town.

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It was a dull, dreary journey from Oakshire to Euston. Sir Hugo made no pretence about matters. He was too furious with his daughter to be commonly civil to her, and too much afraid of her to bully her as he could have wished. He disliked reading at all times, and was far too careful of his eyes to read in a train. So he commenced by pretending to go to sleep, and was very soon asleep in real earnest.

Marcia, for her part, had quite enough to do at first in looking out of the windows. I think there is no greater sign of a healthy mind than to be able to take pleasure in scenery—I do not means glaciers, and waterfalls, and other such triumphs of nature, but plain, simple, ordinary English scenery, such as Gainsborough loved to paint, and which out of England can be found to its greatest perfection in those portions of southern France which are not yet fashionable or overrun with tourists.

So Marcia looked out of the windows till it became dark. And then—for she was not the kind of young lady to carry knitting with her, or to bother herself with a bookstall novel—she settled herself down in her corner, and began to think.

It was not a pleasant retrospect over which she had to travel. She had lost what she firmly believed to be her only chance of happiness in life, and had lost it in such a manner as to put it beyond the possibility of recovery. She could see nothing before her now except years of unhappiness with her father. The only escape from this was marriage, and marriage now was out of the question. You might, indeed, as well have suggested to her that she

should enter an English convent to take one extreme; or to take another, that she should sing three songs a night at a music-hall, each with its proper allowance of *double entendre* and gesticulation.

In a general kind of way she concluded that she must live on in Sloane Street, see as little of her father as possible; above all, avoid recriminations with him, and perhaps occupy herself with her brush or her pen, and so make sure of a little income of her own.

It was a barren prospect enough—joyless, hopeless, and in all human probability endless. She could not even feel of life as did the philosopher who remarked, *c'est peu de chose, mais—après—c'est tout ce que nous avons.* She was about as thoroughly unhappy as she ought to have been if she had deliberately and wilfully brought all her troubles upon herself.

Vague ideas occurred to her of taking up by way of anodyne some sort of regular work, with her father's permission or without it. She could teach, for instance, in the Sunday school of the parish church, or become a district visitor, or insist on drawing every day from the Elgin marbles. She might even set to work in earnest upon music. But all these ideas rather floated before her mind than definitely presented themselves in any practical shape. And ultimately, she too, in the most methodical manner possible, fell asleep.

She is not the only one among us who, without having read their Odyssey, or even their Tennyson, have longed without knowing it for the land of the Lotus-eater. The nearest approach to that land is sleep. I absolutely and flatly refuse to credit the story that Homer, undoubtedly a Levantine Greek, was also an opium-eater. Let any one who has ever known the effects of opium, ask himself in what they resemble the simple happiness of the followers of the King of Ithaca—when they first made trial of the magic flower.

London it was at last, with a dull, heavy September fog, out of which if you had hewn a sample with a knife, and cut a crayon from it, you would certainly have made a distinct stroke of malodorous grease upon a sheet of clean paper. There was a cab of the genus Noah's Ark to be procured for her father and for herself, and all the luggage had to be stowed upon the top of it, and then there was a dreary, dreadful drive down Tottenham Court Road, and along Oxford Street, to the Sloane Street vault; for the house looked through the fog like a mausoleum constructed from the designs of an economical architect, and the stone hall was cold and damp, and there was a sepulchral suspicion in the air of mildew and other such unwholesome and unpleasant things.

The only relief was to be welcomed in this catacomb of a house by dear, honest, lovable Fräulein Dietz. Sir Hugo, who had telegraphed from St. Austell Towers for a fire in his room, retired at once, without so much as a good-night, to brandy-and-water and bed. He was too empty of energy to make himself even commonly disagreeable. This happily left Marcia and the Fräulein to their own devices. And the Fräulein took the weary young girl up to her room, where also there was a fire, and as women say, made a fuss over her, to which Marcia for once in a way did not object.

The cheery little woman made the deftest and tenderest of ladies' maids, and brushed Marcia's heavy hair for her soothingly, and trotted round about her, bent on other little ministrations, and in fairy godmother fashion produced cheering tea and toast with butter, and then as the fire crackled and threw its light over the room, making even the dull, ugly old furniture with all its dilapidations seem cheerful, the Fräulein talked volubly away, steadily refusing to enter upon anything serious until the morrow.

"We must have no tiresome talk to-night," said the little woman, with a determined shake of her little head.

"No worries to-night. You shall tell me everything to-morrow over a good walk, or if the fog keeps on, say you are ill, and we'll spend the day up here together."

And the Fräulein clapped her hands, and then she kissed Marcia, and—to tell the homely truth—tucked her up, and looked to the fire, and the blinds, and the curtains and the candle, and the matches, and so trotted away.

If ever there was a thoroughly honest soul in all Sloane Street, or for the matter of that anywhere else in this world, it was little Fräulein Dietz.

And when next morning London woke under a canopy of fog, in one quarter of which was a small, bilious patch, to just remind Londoners that there was such a thing as a sun in the universe, which in happier regions and under more favourable circumstances was occasionally visible to the eye, the Fräulein came again to her child, and again tended her, and when the house was quit of Sir Hugo for the day, came and sat with her in her room, and listened patiently to the whole story, the outlines of which she had pretty shrewdly guessed for herself before Marcia fitted them in.

"It will be all right yet, my dear," said the good soul. "I wish I could help things on a bit myself, instead of merely being able to see them. There is a capital word in your English, Marcia. We have very good words in German, but we should want something like twenty-seven syllables to bring home to our Teutonic minds the exact force and meaning of what I believe is called gumption. Now my gumption, Marcia dear, is like the familiar spirit of that funny old pagan, Socrates, which always managed to let him know when things were going right and when they were going wrong. And this same gumption of mine tells me that things are going right at this minute, and will end as well as can be."

Then the Fräulein paused, and twisted her forehead

and the corners of her mouth into most uncompromising wrinkles, and shook her head viciously.

"Never mind about your father, my child. He is a short-sighted old gentleman, and buzzes about like a big fly in the window. The buzz sounds very terrible, but there is no sting. Wait. Everything comes to those who wait. Sleep in the wood and the Prince will come, as he does in the fairy tale, and wake you with the prettiest of kisses. Your Mr. Douglas is a gentleman with a stout heart, my dear—so at least I think. And if he is not, we will not break our own, or do anything else that is foolish. We will take care of one another. You shall look after the old woman, Marcia, and the old woman will put on her best spectacles and keep her eyes open and look after you. What a merry little time we will have of it together. Do you remember Canning, who pokes fun at us Germans in his clever *Anti-Jacobin*—"A sudden thought has struck me. Let us swear an eternal friendship'?"

And at this even Marcia laughed, for high spirits are contagious. And with the laugh the eternal friendship was as completely ratified as if it had been a deed of indenture signed, sealed, and delivered, *secundum artem*.

The business faculty was strongly developed in Fräulein Dietz.

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The next few weeks were perhaps the least eventful in Marcia's life, but certainly not the least important. Let me explain exactly what I mean.

When in the tropics you encounter a cyclone, the resources of your vessel and your crew are taxed to the utmost. You are in a hurricane that may last for an hour or more. You ride through it in safety. Then comes a deceitful period of calm, which does not hoodwink old navigators. A landsman would think that all was over, and would wonder at seeing every man at his

post, and every brow beetled with anxiety. Foolish landsman! The cyclone has two motions. It is a great ring of hurricane of the most furious kind, rapidly rotating round its centre. But the whole ring has also a forward motion of its own, and is travelling at the rate of many miles a minute in a straight line. Suddenly, and with the least notice, its full frenzy will strike you on the other side. Surmount that danger and you are safe; omit to anticipate it, and you are lost.

After the return to Sloane Street, Sir Hugo, aware that an exhibition of temper at home would not avail him very much, or in any way retrieve the prospects which had once lain before his gaze, persistently sulked, with an almost feminine lack of dignity.

He lay in bed late, condemned with a vehemence unusual for him the quality of his tea and toast, grumbled even more over his hot water, and departed to his club fully an hour and a half late. He was more or less permanently ill-conditioned.

Jack Tar, speaking of a man who is passing through a fever of this kind, will tell you that "he has got the hump"—a significant phrase, implying that he is sitting huddled together, with his shoulders arched up over his ears. If ever a man "had the hump" in this world, and bore his burden with the minimum of resignation and the maximum of querulous, fussy ostentation, it was Sir Hugo.

As he showed himself in the morning, his features wore an air of resigned woe, as of a man misunderstood, rejected, reviled, and forsaken, a martyr without a crown, a saint with no prospect of a place in the calendar.

But his appetite remained sound, and enabled him to bear up against what must have inevitably overwhelmed a feebler constitution.

So much for Sir Hugo. Marcia meantime had nothing to do but to think, and to talk things over with the Fräu-

lein. The thinking did not lead to much. She certainly had the world before her, but it was an ocean of which she had no chart. It might be her lot to "touch the happy isles," or it might be that the gulfs would wash her down. All she could feel was that she must trust in herself, and in herself alone. And the first difficulty was not insuperable.

Exactly as the son of a county gentleman, who is of the requisite height, strength, health, and youth, can always enlist, so Marcia knew that she could always obtain a situation as a governess if her father's future conduct rendered it impossible for her to remain at home.

She would, moreover, have several advantages. There would be a roof over her head, and a home of some sort, which she would enjoy of right and not as a favour. There would be regular work, which is the best of all anodynes for the heartache, and there would be the sense of independence. So far, then, the future was clear.

For the rest, her life was very much that, in its surroundings and atmosphere, if not in the incidents that had led up to its present crisis, of Mariana in the Moated Grange. There is very much of the Moated Grange about Sloane Street; there are the broken flower-pots crusted with thickest moss, the rusted nails hanging by shreds from the walls, and here and there the trees wearily throwing their shadow, if there be sun for a shadow, as if they had sinned in the tropics, and had been transplanted by way of punishment to this land of fog and frost and filth and mist—a land where all things seem hopelessly the same.

It is Tennyson who in "In Memoriam" calls Harley Street "the long unlovely street." But if Harley Street be longer than Sloane Street, which I doubt, I will maintain in disputation as a thesis against the ghost of Peter Cunningham himself, that Sloane Street, in spite of its few smart shops, is the more unlovely of the two.

"To live for ever in this horrible street," thought Marcia to herself, "would simply drive me mad." And yet she saw no possible means of escape. Andromeda chained to her rock was not more forlorn or helpless. And it made things worse that she had the common sense to realise matters, in a matter-of-fact kind of way.

Sir Hugo, with nothing on earth to ruffle the even tenor of his self-contained existence, might well live on for many years to come. Besides, Marcia, although devoid of any particular shade of superstition, was sufficiently a woman to hold that for a child to speculate on the death of its parent is parricide in thought, and no less a crime than parricide in fact.

At times her thoughts would wander back to Douglas, and she would wonder vaguely whether they would ever meet again. For it would be idle to pretend that her wings had not been singed, although singed slightly. And at that moment Douglas would have been a most happy solution of all her difficulties. I am sure that if he had come to the house, in his own sudden, abrupt, peremptory, and forcible manner, and told her that he had changed his mind, and meant to marry her whether she liked it or not, she would have welcomed him.

But nothing of the sort happened. Mr. Douglas had no intention of changing his mind whatever. His recreations, such as they were, never took him down Sloane Street or into Hyde Park, so that, possibly happily for both of them, however the meeting might have turned out, they did not cross each other's path.

But Marcia found out an odd little amusement of her own. It was better than district visiting, it was more interesting, and it gave her material for distraction. She wandered one day down Sloane Street, through Sloane Square, and so strayed, as sailors would have it, "west and by south," until she found herself, without knowing where she was, in the gardens of Chelsea Hospital.

A portion of these are reserved as allotments for the retired veterans, each of whom has his little patch, rather larger than billiard-tables, and cultivates it according to his own fancy. Some of them are masters of rock-work, and as skilful in the art of fortification in miniature model as "my uncle Toby" himself. Others, of a botanical or possibly culinary turn of mind, devote themselves to asparagus, early peas, and other dainties. Others are sufficiently human to grow such flowers as will tolerate the London atmosphere—marigolds, dahlias, sweet peas, and other hardly annuals.

Marcia took to wandering among these allotments and cultivating the old men. They were picturesque to the eye, and in themselves a quaint study of human nature. She used to buy them tobacco and snuff, for which they were properly grateful. And then she would wander out into the Lime Walk, and so sometimes perhaps stroll over into Battersea Park, the most beautiful by far of the London parks and the least known. Or else she would make her way briskly home, through the wilderness of Lower Sloane Street and Sloane Square, and so fall back again upon her books, her music, her pencil, or her own thoughts.

Excellent books

CHAPTER XIV

A FEW weeks after the return of Marcia and her father, a thing happened at Boodle's which for some days, indeed for nearly a week, set all the old gentlemen in all the bay windows in St. James's Street solemnly shaking their heads, and made not a few of them distinctly nervous—in fact, so nervous as to positively spoil their habitual enjoyment of the good things of this life.

Sir Hugo, at about half-past two in the afternoon, had just finished the lunch which he sometimes made do duty for a dinner, thereby saving table-money, and enabling himself later in the day to devote to bridge a mind unclouded by the somewhat soporific progress of digestion.

He had finished the last glass of his pint of claret, and was arguing with the head-waiter about his bill, which was, he insisted, sixpence too much. The matter, small as it was, seemed to ruffle him extremely, so that a sort of hush came over the room and everybody listened.

"I will not be insulted," said Sir Hugo. "I will have none of your insolence. You shall suffer for this. I will write at once to the committee and lay the facts before them. This impertinence shall cost you——"

Here Sir Hugo unaccountably stopped. The muscles of his face twitched. A sort of spasm shook him all over. He tottered for a moment to and fro, and then fell forward helplessly and heavily upon his face.

They picked him up and put him in a chair, and tried to force some brandy in a teaspoon through his set teeth, and tore off his collar and neck-tie and rubbed his hands; but it was all of no use. The doctor from Arlington Street

who had been sent for came quickly across, put his finger on the pulse and looked serious. He motioned silence, and for a few seconds they all stood round and looked on, turning their glances from the doctor and his patient to one another, and then back again to the doctor. All that could be heard was the ticking of the coffee-room clock. The proprietor, came hurrying on to the scene, looking almost as astonished as on that memorable occasion when he was blown across his own kitchen by the force of a gas explosion.

The doctor laid Sir Hugo's hand down, resting it gently upon his leg.

"He is dead," said he. "The heart has ceased to beat."

And then they all looked on Sir Hugo, and saw in his face that he was dead. And they broke up and gathered together in little knots of four or five, and talked in whispers for a few seconds, and so went one after another almost noiselessly from the room. The doctor was right. The troubles of this world will vex Sir Hugo no longer, and there is a vacancy in the list of members of the club which for so many years had practically been his home.

Before an hour was over the paper boys were calling out in the streets, "Special edition. Sudden death of a baronet at a West End Club! Terrible excitement!"

There was no biography of Sir Hugo ready that evening in any editorial pigeon-hole. He had not been a person of sufficient importance. But at the offices of the *Morning Post*, his favourite paper, a deputy assistant sub-editor got down Debrett from the shelves, and "did" Sir Hugo in fourteen lines. Three lines more being needed by the exigences of "measurement," he added that the deceased baronet, who was well-known in London society, had been for several years a member of the club in which the sad occurrence took place, and where his

loss would be deeply lamented by a large circle of friends and acquaintances. The title, it was added, expires with him, the only representative of the family now surviving being his daughter, Miss Marcia Conyers, by his late wife Lady Conyers, who predeceased him by some years.

What effect had the melancholy intelligence upon Marcia? Exactly as much as might have been expected. A sudden death is always a terrible thing. But for years past Marcia and her father had had no tie to bind them together, unless it were the fact that they shared the same roof.

By his death she did not even lose a companion. Nor can it be said, on the other hand, that by it she gained her liberty. For her liberty was now valueless to her. The sole change made in her position by Sir Hugo's death was that it left her more than ever free, when it was too late, to choose her own course of life and to work it out for herself.

Sir Hugo's only two mourners were the doctor whom he usually consulted when it had pleased him to consider himself ailing, and the old family solicitor. Nor am I in a position to state who was responsible for the tombstone which recorded the dates of his birth and death, adding, according to the accustomed formula, that he was deeply lamented by a large circle of relations and friends. The payment of the undertaker's bill, which was sent in with business-like promptitude, left Marcia, according to Sir Hugo's solicitor, mistress of an exceedingly small balance at the bank, and a house full of dismal and faded furniture.

The man of law was kind enough to arrange for the sale of everything that could be sold except her own books and trifles, and when Marcia was able at last to ascertain her exact position, she found that she was worth about four hundred pounds. Sir Hugo, it seems, had characteristically converted everything on earth to which

he was entitled into an annuity. He would have included the furniture as well had it been possible to do so with the least advantage to himself, or the addition of even a five-pound-note to his annual income.

And thus Sir Hugo passes away from our history, having done as much mischief as was possible, without even the excuse of doing it from the best of motives.

* * * * *

Almost immediately after the funeral, and before the inevitable sale by auction, with all its unpleasant incidents, Marcia and the Fräulein went away together to a small seaside place where lodgings and living are cheap even in what is called the height of the season; and here for a week or two the Fräulein knitted elaborate works of art in Berlin wool, while Marcia boldly set to work to colour photographs, finding her own colours of course, for an eminent local photographer, who paid her sixpence a piece for the photographs, and a guinea for enlarged copies, or, as they are called in the trade, miniatures from the photographs.

These he retailed, the photographs half a guinea each, and the enlarged pictures, according to the credulity of his customers, from five guineas upwards.

Meantime the two ladies borrowed the *Times* every morning from the circulating library and newspaper shop, and diligently answered every advertisement which announced that a governess was needed in a gentleman's family. At the end of a week or so a definite result was obtained.

Mr. Huggins of the Stock Exchange and of Queen's Gate wanted a governess for his four daughters. The qualifications required were such as Marcia possessed. The fact that she was an adept in free-hand drawing and otherwise clever with her pencil and brush, helped her considerably, Mr. Huggins being, like many other city

men, a judge of pictures and a judicious purchaser, and anxious consequently that any little leaning towards art his children might have should be increased and developed.

And thus it came about that Marcia found herself installed at Queen's Gate, with a salary of actually seventy pounds a year, and with comforts about her such as those which she had seen for the first time in her life at St. Austell Towers. And there was another ray of pleasant sunshine in her life: for Fräulein Dietz had taken lodgings, two tiny little rooms, in one of those quaint nooks which still exist in Old Chelsea, and every now and then, when the children were taken by their mother in a body to a flower-show, or for a round of visits, or to some entertainment or other at the Hall which commemorates the many virtues public and domestic of the late Prince Consort, Marcia was free to run round to the Fräulein, and have one of those long talks about nothing and everything which seem somehow to soothe the female mind, exactly as it soothes a man to sit down opposite another man and to smoke a pipe with him in that solemn silence which is perhaps the very surest indication of mutual regard.

So that Marcia's life was now busy, useful, and independent, and consequently contented in proportion. "Live on a shilling a day and earn it," said Abernethy to the old nobleman who wanted that eminent physician to cure him of chronic indigestion. And with plenty to do, and the resolution to do it conscientiously and thoroughly, Marcia found her life far happier and brighter than she had ever hoped or expected.

Mr. Huggins had commenced life as a clerk. He was industrious and punctual. For year after year he never asked for a week's holiday, and the only amusements he permitted himself were harmless and simple. He liked to go to the pit of the theatre, especially if he could get a free pass. He was also partial to harmonic meetings at old-fashioned public-houses, and would occasionally go

so far as to consent himself to oblige the company with a song or perhaps a recitation.

But in his own way, and according to his own lights, he was ambitious. He had the sense to see that life is the pleasanter for many things which only money can give you. So it came to pass that one morning he very much astonished his employer, who paid him his salary weekly, by respectfully giving that gentleman three months' notice, intimating that he would be ready to leave his stool in the office sooner, or in fact at once, if his place could be filled up.

For Mr. Huggins had actually made about a thousand pounds, and had resolved to start as a jobber on his own account. While he was still a clerk, and with apparently no prospect of ever being anything more, he had married the present Mrs. Huggins, whose father kept a shop in Old Kensington, where he sold eggs, butter, dairy-fed pork, and other farm produce.

The two men made acquaintance at a select harmonic meeting held on the first floor of a large public-house, and the intimacy thus commenced progressed so favourably, that after he had dined a certain number of Sundays with the pork-butcher, Huggins, with that gentleman's consent, and in fact approbation, led his eldest daughter to the altar of Old Kensington Church.

The honeymoon was spent at Gravesend, and when the young couple returned, the pork-butcher did his duty as a man and a father, furnishing a house at Hammersmith, of which he purchased a seven years' lease, and otherwise substantially evincing his satisfaction.

It was not long after the marriage that Mr. Huggins, as we have said, was able to start in Capel Court on his own account. He had given his father-in-law some excellent advice, and had so secured that old gentleman's confidence. He knew the ins and outs of the Stock Exchange to a shade. He was a cool-headed man, who never

speculated except upon a certainty, or, as they say on the Turf, never overlaid his book.

I have heard it said by a most eminent broker when discussing the mysteries of his craft, that early information combined with a large credit would ruin the devil in a month. Mr. Huggins stuck to solid business, and allowed others to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. And money is like a snowball. It is excessively difficult to make five hundred pounds. But it is not at all difficult, with patience, coolness, and a few other kindred virtues, to turn your five hundred pounds into five hundred thousand. And that is what Mr. Huggins did.

He had everything now that ought to have made him happy—everything, in short, that money can command. But as the greatest of all Roman poets has it, the *amari aliquid* was perceptible in his cup. He felt, as did the illustrious Mr. Boffin, that his wife's ways were not as his own. She had largely developed on the aristocratic side of her nature, while her unfortunate husband still retained his simple tastes; and when at the head of his own table, if he took the trouble to glance down the French *menu*, would think with a sigh of the days when he used to enjoy thoroughly his beef-steak and pickled walnuts with a pint of ale at the Jamaica coffee-house.

And when in the evening the distinguished professionals who honoured him with their company, and expected as a matter of course a twenty-pound-note to be sent to them the next morning, were pounding on the grand piano, or electrifying the company with the latest Italian *tour de force* for the lungs and throat, his mind used to wander back to the happy days when he used to hear the hammer descend upon the table, and the chairman's cheery voice call out, "Gentlemen, Mr. Jones will kindly oblige; gentlemen, give your orders. Silence, gentlemen, if you please, for the 'Death of Nelson.'"

Believe me, that in this life the truest pleasures are the simplest. What human being in the world is so happy for the moment as a child unexpectedly taken to see the horse-riders?

Mrs. Huggins, on the other hand, was now in all her glory. She had cut all her old friends and school acquaintances. She had no poor relations to trouble her. She was thoroughly content and satisfied with herself. It never occurred to her that the society which frequented her *salons* showed her consideration out of respect for the sterling good qualities of her husband. She fully believed herself a *grande dame*, and made herself correspondingly ridiculous.

The daughters took after their mother, and so far as nature had intended them for anything, were admirably fitted to become barmaids at a busy railway counter.

The eldest was nearly eighteen, and was shortly to "come out." Her name was Catherine. In the family circle she was Kitty. In society, and at the foot of her letters, she was Celia. Prosperity had not done much to improve her natural disposition of talents. She was, in fact, ingrainedly vulgar, and very superficially veneered. Her younger sisters were good-natured, rough, and distinctly boyish in their tastes and habits. They had not yet been spoiled. Their names, for which the mother was responsible, were Victoria Maude, Honoria Alice, and Alexandra Louise. Victoria Maude would be sixteen on her next birthday. The ages of the other two I cannot exactly undertake to give, but the elder was past fourteen, and the younger nearly twelve.

The life of a governess is, especially in a wealthy family, proverbially unpleasant. Marcia escaped many of its indignities. But it would be idle to pretend that she was happy; and to be merely comfortable is, for the young, at any rate, the smallest element in happiness.

A governess, after all, is rated on the ship's books by

her wages, which are often less than those of the cook, ladies' maid, and first housemaid. For a girl who is at all proud, however rightly, or even sensitive, the occupation is a slow torture, galling to the last degree. And so Marcia soon found it.

I could easily set out a list of the petty things under which she had to chafe, with nothing to console her except the knowledge that she was doing her work honestly and thoroughly. But I forbear the recital, as it would be unintelligible to any man who may happen to read this history, and for any woman wholly and absolutely unnecessary.

When I was a child there used to be a story in my History of England about Alfred in the swineherd's hut, and I have often wondered whether it ever, amid her present surroundings, came up in Marcia's mind as it very well might have done. I have always gathered from the story, by the way, that the swineherd himself was a very decent kind of fellow, but desperately in terror of his wife.

One incident occurred to break the otherwise monotonous current of her life. John Douglas, hearing of Sir Hugo's death, or seeing it in the papers, called at Sloane Street, to find the carpets and hearthrugs hanging in the balconies, the walls placarded with posters, men running about in aprons and slippers, and all the other symptoms of a sale.

He saw the auctioneer's foreman, and gave that dignified person instructions to buy in for him several things which he felt certain Marcia would value. The most important among them was a large oil painting, which spoke for itself as the portrait of her mother. The remainder were trifles which, with the instinct of a lawyer, he could detect as being valuable in Marcia's eyes, and in some cases possibly sacred.

Then, through the auctioneer, he found out the family

solicitor, and through that gentleman easily ascertained where Marcia was staying. He then wrote her a letter of condolence—as simple and manly a letter as need be—and made arrangements to have his purchases put at her disposal. The letter was answered, and Mr. Douglas warmly thanked, and then the correspondence stopped; and Marcia, having obtained from Mrs. Huggins a somewhat ungracious consent, was enabled to make her own room more of a home by arranging in it the treasures thus happily rescued.

Mr. Huggins himself was pleased to inspect the picture, and to pronounce his opinion that it was an admirable work of art, and so far as he could judge must have been a striking likeness of the lady herself. He was reprimanded for this by his wife, who told him roundly that the master of the house had no business to encourage a young woman in his service by chattering to her, and that for her part she thought a big picture like that was not at all the kind of thing for the bedroom of a governess who knew her position.

After this incident Marcia's life went on with terrible regularity and precision. What is the daily routine of a governess? The life of a city clerk from nine in the morning until five or six is absolute and unfettered liberty to it. He has, at any rate, his two daily journeys, his half hour for lunch, the companionship of his fellow-clerks, and his entire evening to himself.

The governess has to rise early. She must breakfast with her pupils, and put them through dress parade. Then come lessons, and a walk in the park, and early dinner. Then, if it be fine, a walk again, or if it be wet more lessons of a light character. Then there is tea—and then her evening is her own, unless the mistress of the house can either find or invent something for her to do.

There is a point beyond which it is not wise to irritate your cook. But out of your governess you can, as the

saying is, "take it"; and ladies with any sense of what is due to themselves are apt to take it out of the governess very relentlessly. Her real rest is the half hour before she falls asleep.

There is a peculiarity about sleep. If you are happy and contented with your position, you go to sleep the moment you have gone to bed. Soldiers and sailors can do this. Life sits lightly upon them.

Marcia slept now from very weariness, but it was not the wholesome sleep from which you wake refreshed. And often, as she lay thinking, she would hear the clocks chime hour after hour, until the sparrows, for whom she put stray crumbs upon her sill, would come to twitter over their meal, and through the London skies would struggle the London day.

CHAPTER XV

One morning occurred an incident which materially altered the whole course of Marcia's hitherto placid if dreary existence under the roof of the *famille* Huggins.

She was walking with the children in Hyde Park. They had made their way to Albert Gate, and were strolling among the little nooks of rockery and fern and waterwork, when they were overtaken by Lord Norwich, who had been breakfasting at Knightsbridge Barracks, and was strolling along with his host and a companion, both in uniform. None of the three was in a hurry. They were, in fact, leisurely discussing the prospects of certain horses who had done well last autumn, and were now prominent in the betting for the Two Thousand and Derby.

Hastily excusing himself, Norwich left his companions and went straight up to Marcia, whom he had not seen since they were at St. Austell's Towers. Then there was about three minutes' conversation of the recognised and conventional type. Lord Norwich had, of course, been greatly shocked and distressed to learn of Sir Hugo's death. He was extremely happy to meet Miss Conyers again. He would do himself the honour of leaving his card in Sloane Street, and so on. And then the conversation became less formal and more natural.

Marcia had to tell Lord Norwich as briefly as she could all that had happened to her since they last met, and to explain her present position and occupation. Then came a discussion as to whether Lord Norwich could call upon her. Marcia, of course, saw that this was out of the question. An ex-guardsman, still a bachelor, cannot con-

sistently with the recognised proprieties pay morning visits to a nursery governess. So ultimately it was arranged that Lord Norwich should find out somebody who knew the Huggins, and should, as he emphatically put it, "work the oracle" in that way.

"There are one or two fellows in my old regiment," said he, "who are the sons of City men, or somehow connected with the City. The thing ought to be easy enough. Let me set about it in my own way, Miss Conyers, and we will soon see. And I can only say that it gives me real pleasure to know that we now are not likely to lose sight of one another. It will certainly not be my fault if we do."

And with this they shook hands, and as Lord Norwich walked away with his old brother-officers in one direction, Marcia and her charges pursued another.

This is exactly what happened; the whole of what happened, and nothing more. But Marcia's pupils took the story home to their mother, and without the least intention of doing mischief were singularly unfortunate in their account of what had taken place.

Mrs. Huggins learned to her horror that Marcia had been talking to soldiers in the Park. There are plenty of persons who are firmly persuaded that the publicans mentioned in the New Testament were none other than licensed victuallers; and when the pork-butcher's daughter was informed that her governess had actually been walking and talking with a companion of common soldiers, presumably a common soldier himself, if not indeed something much worse, she composed herself to that peculiarly feminine state of mind in which a lady feels herself counsel of the prosecution, principal witness for the prosecution, judge to sum up to the jury, jury to act upon the judge's advice and convict out of hand, and judge again to pass sentence in the most approved style.

Accordingly she summoned Marcia to her presence, and promptly opened fire upon her.

"I am shocked beyond measure, Miss Conyers," began the matron; "shocked and greatly disappointed—for I had a very favourable character with you—to find that you have actually while in charge of my children been talking to a lot of common soldiers in the Park. I never heard of anything so disgraceful! It is what one might expect from the nursemaid, if you sent her out with the perambulator, exactly what you might expect; but I certainly never expected anything of the kind from you."

"I think, madam, you are mistaken," answered Marcia.

"Don't 'ma'am' me, Miss Conyers," replied the lady, with a dignity that would have irresistibly set you thinking of Juno in a burlesque; "don't 'ma'am' me. Perhaps you will next ask me to believe that my own dear children are story-tellers."

"I do not ask you to believe anything of the sort, Mrs. Huggins," said Marcia, losing her temper in her turn; "the children have no doubt told you exactly what happened; but the gentleman who spoke to me was Lord Norwich, whom I met a few months ago when I was staying at Lady St. Austell's with my father. Who Lord Norwich's friends were I do not know, but I saw from their uniform they were officers in the Guards."

Now this was a facer for Mrs. Huggins. She was altogether unequal to the occasion. Evidently she had made a mistake if Marcia was telling the truth. Clearly if Marcia were not telling the truth she was a very wicked and designing young woman. Ladies of the stamp of Mrs. Huggins are apt to be illogical in their ill-temper. The best way out of the difficulty was to assume that Marcia was telling falsehoods, so Mrs. Huggins looked unutterable things, and with an intimation that she should lay the matter before Mr. Huggins that evening swept out of the room.

Now Mr. Huggins, although usually deferring to his wife for the sake of peace and quietness, was apt at times to speak his mind, and to speak it plainly.

"You must be a born fool, Maria," said the stock-broker in a tone his wife knew, and of which she was secretly afraid; "the girl's a lady as much as yourself. Why on earth should she tell you lies about the matter? Old Sir Hugo was a swell, and knew more lords than you or I know the names of. I dare say the girl thinks no more of a lord than you do of a lord mayor. You just get that black monkey down off your shoulder, and be civil to the girl. We know a lord or two as it is, but we could afford another. Go and make it up with her, and let's have this young swell's legs under my mahogany. The girls are coming on, and I could manage to do the handsome if one of them married well. Who knows what may happen?

And having delivered himself of this, for him, unusually long allocution, Mr. Huggins strode off in a bit of a temper to a den which he called his library, where he kept a few old books, a box or two of cigars, and a cellarette.

Mrs. Huggins did not like the rebuke any the better because she saw the justice of it. It stuck in her gizzard, to use her own words, that she should have to eat humble pie to a governess. But she knew her husband far too well to risk disobeying him when he was evidently in earnest.

So she made Marcia a lame and most ungracious apology, explaining that she was suffering that morning from one of her bad headaches, and she then plunged at once into diplomacy.

"Mr. Huggins and myself, Miss Conyers, have every wish that you should see your own friends, so far of course as is consistent with the proper discharge of your duties as governess, and Mr. Huggins wishes me to say that he is quite agreeable that Lord Norwich should call here. In

fact some friends of his were on the very point of introducing us. So that it will perhaps be as well if you write to his lordship and enclose an invitation to dinner."

Now here it was actually suggested to her to do the very thing which Lord Norwich had himself promised to arrange. It was difficult to know what to say. Marcia pointed out to Mrs. Huggins that she could hardly write to Lord Norwich herself, or invite him to a house which was not her own.

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do," said Mrs. Huggins, who was now quite keen in the matter, and most anxious to retrieve her blunder; "Mr. Huggins and I will send his lordship a dinner-card for the week after next, and I shall write upon it, to meet Miss Conyers, and you shall address the envelope. We'll make it the week after next, so as to make sure of his coming." And to this Machiavellian stroke of diplomacy Marcia could only give an unwilling consent, recollecting that after all Lord Norwich did not know her handwriting, and would so conclude that the card came from Mrs. Huggins herself.

And next day the Huggins family was in the height of its glory. For a groom with a cockade in his hat came round and left a polite note of acceptance; and it took Mr. and Mrs. Huggins some hours to settle the list of their guests, and to fashion a suitable party to meet, as Mrs. Huggins proudly observed, a peer of the realm.

However, the thing was done. The chief of the notables was a very worthy Manchester warehouseman, Sir Nathaniel Styles, who for his sins had been knighted during his year of mayoralty. Then there was the vicar of the parish, who had to be asked because his curate, the Honourable and Rev. Duodecimus Stapylton, was absolutely necessary, and could not well be asked, so the Huggins thought, without his chief. The family doctor, a sufficiently well-known practitioner at the West End, and the family solicitor, whose chambers were in Lincoln's

Inn Fields and his suburban villa at Highgate, were added to the list. The rest were City men in a large and solvent way, one of them being Prime Warden for the year of the Ladlemakers' Company, while another, a distinguished soap-boiler, was also a Governor of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. So that, as Mrs. Huggins reflected and in fact proudly observed to her spouse, the company was as good as any man in his senses need desire, and better than nineteen people out of twenty had any right to expect.

In the story of all the anxieties which the arrangements of the banquet involved Thackeray would have delighted to enter. An eminent West End cook and confectioner sent round a trusty lieutenant with a couple of kitchen-maids, who had *carte blanche* given them for three days, and exercised the privilege as freely as it was given.

On flowers and fruit and other such things no expense was spared. Celia and Victoria Maude accompanied by their mother had a long and very satisfactory interview with that most distinguished milliner, Madame Hortense of Upper Brook Street. Mr. Huggins gave his mind to the wines and liqueurs, this being the one part of the business he thoroughly understood. The rare and choice fruits for the dessert wer left to the skill and judgment of Mr. Nehemiah Isaacs of Covent Garden and Bond Street, whose foreman also undertook the appropriate decoration of the table and of the room generally with exotics.

Mrs. Huggins was in the seventh heaven of gratified vanity. Never before had she known her husband relax his purse-strings so ungrudgingly. Mr. Huggins was also pleased in his own quiet way to have the chance of letting his city friends see that he knew a lord—and no ordinary lord either, but one with an old title, and, as Mr. Huggins tersely put it, "pots of money."

For poor lords are held cheap in the city, where not

a few of them condescend to add to their limited incomes by guinea-pigging.

As for Miss Huggins and Miss Victoria Maude Huggins, they were dazzled by the splendour of the raiment they were to wear, and bewildered with dim visions of what might possibly happen if things were only to turn out as they do in fairy stories with a young prince and fairy godmother.

And so the hours went busily on till the fateful evening came.

I need not describe the meal. It was everything that could be desired. I am told that if you give the *chef* at the Travellers' discretion, and politely tell him that you leave the whole thing to his better judgment and experience, you can get the best dinner in London. Among City feeds that of the Goldsmiths' is undoubtedly the best, and next perhaps ranks that of the Fishmongers, while the Vintners are not far behind, and give a character to their banquet at the right season by serving up a swan.

Occasionally, too, a City man who is planning a good swindle, or has successfully carried a good swindle through, will invite his confederates to a private spread at the Ship and Turtle or De Keyser's. Mr. Huggins deliberately resolved not to emulate these noble repasts, but to eclipse them by a banquet such as those given by American millionaires at the Savoy to the representatives of literature and art.

More than this I need hardly say. The dinner was one to be remembered. Delmonico himself would have expressed approval of it, and its cost per head made Mr. Huggins proud to think that he could do that kind of thing if he chose once a week without troubling himself.

Everything passed off as such dinners usually do. The men ate with discretion. The ladies ate recklessly and of everything, as is often the female habit. When the wine had made one circuit of the table and the fruit had been

considered and admired, Lord Norwich, by virtue of his proximity, did duty at the door, and the ladies swept by him in gorgeous procession. Marcia, in mourning for her father, wore plain black silk, with a little collar of old point lace. Beyond this, although she had no ornament of any kind, as Talleyrand said of Lord Castlereagh, she was "*bien décorée.*"

Then came rare vintages and liqueurs, and choice cigars and coffee had to be sent in several times, for the men found the wine good, and were disposed to linger over it. When at last they filed up the great staircase with that peculiarly sheepish look which Englishmen have when joining the ladies, Lord Norwich was doomed to disappointment. Marcia had disappeared.

"You see, my lord," said Mrs. Huggins, "Miss Conyers is still far from strong, and she rises early. Else I should have asked her to stop and play, for I am told she has a very good touch."

His lordship, being unable to shrug his shoulders, could only murmur some general expression of regret. But, as I have before had occasion to observe, he was a young gentleman of rather more than ordinary intelligence, and certainly able to make a very shrewd guess as to how matters stood. The opinion he expressed at the Guards' Club some hours afterwards was vigorous. It did Mrs. Huggins justice, and I am sure that Mr. Huggins himself would have chuckled if he could have heard it.

However, Lord Norwich called in a day or two and left his card, and the little bits of pasteboard were reverently looked at and conspicuously deposited on the top of many other pasteboards in a large china bowl in the drawing-room. And Mrs. Huggins became gracious to Marcia. For a lord is a lord after all, and this one was a lord of the right sort, and it was consequently just as well to do a little to make Miss Conyers contented and willing to remain. Anyhow, nothing could be gained, as Mrs.

Huggins tersely phrased it, by putting the young woman's back up. Besides," the worthy matron incidentally remarked to her husband, "Miss Conyers, I am quite sure, has a temper of her own, and it would be foolish at present to rough her up. We must see how things go, Mr. Huggins." And in the soundness of this policy Mr. Huggins was pleased to express his entire concurrence.

To wait and see how things would turn up was, from his point of view, the very perfection of all worldly wisdom. There is no knowing what may happen if you will only wait; or as they say in the City, if you can afford to hold on.

So it was decided between Mr. Huggins and his spouse that they should hold on. "There's no hurry, my dear," sagely observed the stock-jobber; "things may turn out as you and I should wish, or they may not. Anyhow, this young swell is a good fellow, and a good card to play. There's no reason why he shouldn't take a fancy to Celia, who is a monstrous fine-looking girl, very like what you were when you were her age. And though I say it who shouldn't, he might do a deuced deal worse. He wouldn't be the first lord, anyhow, who's married the daughter of a self-made man, and not done so badly by it either."

And Mr. Huggins rubbed his hands, and allowed himself for a moment to think how much he was worth. This was an enjoyment in which he seldom indulged, being, like many other rich men, superstitious, and holding that it brings bad luck to think of what you have already made, and distracts you from the plain path of duty, which is to think how you can make more.

CHAPTER XVI

Lord Norwich did his duty like a man, and called upon the Huggins family more often than was absolutely necessary, so that Mrs. Huggins was intensely gratified, and in fact began to let not a few of her old friends fully understand the social distinction which had befallen her household; whereat, with all the truly Christian spirit of the average British matron, the friends in question said spiteful things to one another about Mrs. Huggins behind her back, one of them indeed so far forgetting what was due to her own position in society as to refer to a vulgar but not the less pungent proverb about silk purses and the ears of female swine. But these amenities did no harm, and even if they had come to the knowledge of Mrs. Huggins, would probably have found her too happy to be seriously ruffled by them.

But an incident occurred, small in itself, and yet resembling one of those trifles which are believed occasionally to make and unmake empires and dynasties. It was simply an outbreak of whooping-cough among Marcia's pupils.

The family doctor at once ordered change of air, and so off Marcia and the children were packed to Eastbourne, together with a nurse, a ladies' maid, a landau and a pair of horses.

This Hegira distressed Mrs. Huggins not a little, for Lord Norwich of course had to be left in Town exposed, as Mrs. Huggins sadly thought, to the machinations of every designing mother and every forward young lady whom he might meet. Her only comfort was to reflect

that he had promised her tickets for the next Guard's ball. Beyond this she felt there was nothing left but to put her trust in Providence.

At Eastbourne, of course, there were no lessons. This in childhood is, together with fruit and other such luxuries, the great consolation for illness. Thus Marcia had very much of her time to herself, and when the landau went out with the family for the regulation drive, was entirely her own mistress.

How she utilised these precious hours can easily be guessed. She set to work heart and soul upon a sea-piece. It gave her something to do, which was in itself a distinct gain. But as the work grew under her hands her soul entered into it, and she laboured at it with all her heart.

There is no amount of labour or enthusiasm too great to be given to a picture. Nor was there ever yet a really good picture that was dashed off. Marcia knew this and worked patiently.

Mrs. Huggins condescended to raise no objections. The governess, she thought, might as well be painting during such time as she had to herself as doing anything else. It was in fact more or less laudable in her to do so, as painting is a very proper accomplishment for a finishing governess, from whom it would not be the correct thing to expect plain needlework or anything useful.

As for the possibility that the picture might have any merit in it, such an idea never for a moment crossed Mrs. Huggins' mind. Mrs. Huggins had heard, of course, of Miss Thompson and of Rosa Bonheur, but would have been puzzled to tell which of the two it was painted soldiers and which cattle, and when she went to the Academy, which she regularly did, she looked solemnly at the pictures other people looked at, and so, like Tennyson's Northern Farmer, "came away."

And thus it came about that Marcia was actually

able to get her picture finished during their stay at the seaside.

Now it so happened that Mr. Huggins on one of his weekly visits had noticed the picture in the schoolroom, and like a wise man held his tongue about it until he got a chance of talking to Marcia alone. Then he gave her some really kind and sensible advice.

"It's a good picture, Miss Conyers," he said. "Take my advice; send it quietly in to the Academy. It's a small one, and very likely to be hung. Besides, you have never exhibited yet, and nobody can possibly be jealous of you. I know those painters. They're as bad as actors, and worse. They hate each other like poison. You'll be skied, I'm afraid, but send it in; and look here"—and here he dropped his voice from habit, lest peradventure the wife of his bosom might be within earshot—"here's my card"—and he produced a card and pencilled a few words on the back of it. "When we get back to Town take this to Moss at Knightsbridge, close by Albert Gate. He'll varnish the picture for you, and put it in a proper frame. There's a deal of knack in choosing a suitable frame. And he'll send it in for you, and take all the trouble off your hands. And look here, Miss Conyers, I'll bet you twenty pounds to sixpence it's not rejected. Come now; take the bet for luck."

Marcia did not exactly see where or how the luck lay in the bet, but she felt sure that Mr. Huggins meant kindly; she thanked him warmly, and allowed him to produce his pocket-book and solemnly make an entry in it.

I will abbreviate a story which many writers have told before me, each after his own fashion. Marcia finished her picture, and it was in due course sent, or rather taken round by herself, to Mr. Moss. That gentleman, who knew literally nothing about pictures except how to buy them and sell them (and a useful knowledge) too, was pleased to express himself in terms of the highest admira-

tion. He did his duty by the picture, for Mr. Huggins was one of his best patrons. It was properly strained, varnished, framed, and sent in, and then happened what might reasonably have been expected, and exactly what Mr. Huggins had predicted.

The picture was a small one, and a good one. Marcia, being wholly unknown, had no enemies. It was accepted, and hung in one of the small rooms. So much was due to its merits.

It exactly filled up a small place near the line, and there the hanging committee put it. This was Marcia's luck.

It was really almost in the fitness of things that this poor child should have a stroke of luck at last. But there was better luck to come. Marcia, by Mr. Huggins' advice, put herself entirely in the hands of Mr. Moss. Mr. Moss, for some inscrutable reason of his own, put a reserve price on the picture of a hundred guineas. Good old Mr. Huggins was determined it should not go for less, and he chuckled to himself over his glass of grog.

"Money well laid out," he said; "do the girl good, and do me no harm. Why should I let her take a ten-pound note or three fivers for it? She'll have made her mark in four or five years, and the picture will be worth double the money if I buy it myself. I can easily hang it up in the city. Maria never comes there, and I like to encourage young talent"—a generous sentiment, which Mr. Huggins emphasised with a good warm-hearted imprecation.

And now to tell the story of the picture. Lord Norwich, who of course called at Queen's Gate as soon as the family returned from Eastbourne, heard of the picture, and went straight off to the Academy and made the arrangements for its purchase.

That evening Marcia over her tea in the schoolroom received a letter from Burlington House, to tell her that the picture had been sold at the reserve price to a gentle-

man who had made the purchase through an agent; that it had been duly starred, and that the money was at her disposal.

A hundred guineas! One hundred and five pounds! Marcia had heard of such news before, but to find this amount of wealth at her immediate disposal actually bewildered her.

Her first proceeding was to write to her dear old Fräulein and tell her of the good news. Her next was to make an excuse for going up to Burlington House. Then there was of course the business of identification, and when this was completed, and Marcia had satisfactorily made out that the picture was hers, and that she was herself, she had only to leave the secretary's room with a cheque. The secretary at her request made it open with a few words of warning as to the risk.

The cheque, which was on the Bank of England, was buttoned up in the palm of Marcia's glove, and the bank-notes into which it was converted were also securely taken back to Queen's Gate in the same manner. But the journey back was delightful, for there were one or two little purchases to be made, and Marcia was not above the weakness of a harmless love for shopping.

That evening a number of people were made happy in a small way. Marcia confined her gifts, of course, to her pupils, to the ladies' maid, housemaid, and cook, together with the gentleman who attended to the door and waited at lunch, and a younger gentleman in buttons and a jacket. But the pleasure in the lower regions was universal, and the butler did honour to the occasion by the production of a peculiarly choice bottle of port, which was pleasantly discussed in the housekeeper's room.

Now it so happened (for the Fates rule the affairs of men, and there are a few men who meddle a good deal with the Fates, giving those three worthy spinsters no little trouble over the tapestry-frame) that Lord Norwich

some few days after his eventful purchase found himself at Tattersall's. Having concluded his business at that rendezvous he decided to call at Queen's Gate, and did so. He was shown into the drawing-room, where Marcia was making herself useful by sorting and arranging some music.

Marcia was about to leave the room, but Lord Norwich would not hear of it. He said that he wanted to talk to her about her picture, and he had just entered upon the subject when Mrs. Huggins rustled into the room. That lady was in a state of the greatest trepidation and bustle. For she had apparelled herself hurriedly, and was uneasy as to her general outfit and rigging. Start your yacht at a minute's notice. The next twenty minutes are a period of terrible anxiety. You cannot tell what may happen at any moment. A spar may snap or be "carried," or something else equally important may, in nautical phrase, give way.

At balls and archery-meetings and lawn-tennis tournaments, a piece of tape or even a button has been known to give way with unforeseen and disastrous consequences. And Mrs. Huggins felt uneasy as to the general condition of what yachtsmen would have termed her running-gear. This uneasiness was exasperated by the fact that Marcia and Lord Norwich were chatting together in a manner which the worthy matron afterwards described as brazen-faced.

Mollified for a moment by the manner in which his lordship paid his respects to her, Mrs. Huggins purpled with suppressed indignation at his first remark.

"I was congratulating Miss Conyers," he blurted out in his own schoolboy's way, "upon her success at the Academy. It is really one of the successes of the season. More by luck than judgment, as I acted on the advice of a friend who writes art criticism for the papers and paints a bit himself, I happen to possess the picture, and am

delighted with it. I suppose, Mrs. Huggins, that you have seen it at the Academy yourself?"

At this frank and light-handed "lead off with the left," Mrs. Huggins, in the classical phraseology of sporting circles, "saw stars." Her horizon was bewildered. A mine had been sprung upon her. Her governess, her paid governess—not the governess of anybody else, but her own white slave—had been daring to have leisure, and in that leisure to paint pictures. This was well enough, if allowed upon sufferance. Your governess may practise with her pencil. This so far was well enough. Your governess may practise with her pencil exactly as she may practise on the piano. It is her duty in that station of life to which it has pleased Providence to call her, that she should make herself a proficient by private practice in her own menial arts, exactly as your groom acquires a better seat if he trots about in the morning upon one of the carriage-horses with nothing under him but a rug, and leads another horse by the bridle. But he must do this always in a proper and dutiful spirit, and with no eye to his own prospects in life, recollecting that it would ill become him to set up on his own account as a livery and stable-keeper or a riding-master, when his own master and mistress have always been most kind and considerate to him.

But for a governess to paint on her own account—to steal the time of her employers, and to repay them by the basest treachery—what was the world coming to, thought Mrs. Huggins? And she quivered with indignation.

"I knew," she said, with just as much stiffness as she dared assume towards a "live lord," "that Miss Conyers was considered clever at painting. But I was not aware that she did more in that way than to qualify her for her position in life. Mr. Huggins himself is a very good judge of pictures, and several Royal Academicians are among our most intimate friends. Miss Conyers can hardly hope

to do more than employ her talents in teaching, and it would be a mistaken kindness on the part of her friends to raise her hopes."

This emphatic "gentlemen of the jury, consider your verdict," fairly staggered Lord Norwich. "What was I to say?" he afterwards asked. "I remarked that talent of any kind was a great gift, and that I wished I had any talent of any kind myself. And then I said that an artist's life must be a very jolly one, and that I myself would sooner be an artist than a—yes! I was actually going to say governess. Luckily I pulled myself together just in time, and stumbled out with guardsman, which was about all I had ever been fit for. And then I felt I was only getting deeper into the mud. So I collared my hat, and took my hook."

These were the unhappy young man's exact words, and they represent with sufficient accuracy his exact condition of mind.

When he was fairly out of range of Mrs. Huggins, and the big street door had shut behind him, and he found himself in the street, his lordship whistled—a long, low whistle, all upon a single note. As he had no dog with him, the baker's boy whom he passed stood still, and then turned round and stared after him.

"Another swell gone wrong," said the baker's boy. "They always *will* overlay their book." And the baker's boy went on.

Inside the great house in Queen's Gate Mrs. Huggins did not whistle. Whistling was not among her accomplishments. But she behaved as a wife and a mother and an ornament of society ought to have behaved under such shameful circumstances.

Her anger had hitherto been suppressed. Now it blossomed out, and her face assumed a hue of mottled crimson and white, something like that of Castille soap. She armed herself with her smelling-bottle, went straight

to the library, took up her position on the hearthrug, with her back to the fire, and sent word that Miss Conyers was to come to her at once.

When a man intends to insult you, he stands himself and orders you to sit down. This is a relic of the days of the small sword. It means, "I am a gentleman, and shall not take you at a disadvantage. But, at the same time, my moments are precious; I should waste them if I were to sit down and get up again."

When a woman wishes to insult you, she sits down, and by command, or otherwise, intimates that you are to stand. There are, medical men tell me, especial reasons which make this insult galling. Nothing fatigues a woman more than to stand, while a man can stand all day long, and often prefers to transact the whole of his business upon his feet.

As soon as Marcia entered the room Mrs. Huggins sat down in a large easy-chair, and as she would have said herself, looked the minx over. Marcia on her part waited in silence.

"There are certain things, Miss Conyers," began Mrs. Huggins, "to which I object very strongly. I have been always brought up properly myself, and have been taught to look with disgust upon anything like forwardness or unladylike conduct. Both I and Mr. Huggins" (ego et rex meus) "are disgusted with your conduct. It has really been most disgraceful. I had always understood that your poor father was a perfect gentleman, and that your mother——"

"I will trouble you not to talk about my mother, Mrs. Huggins," said Marcia. "You never knew her."

Here was the opening Mrs. Huggins had wanted. She was on her feet in a moment. When a man wants to tell you that he has had enough of you, but does not care for the trouble of kicking you out, he rings the bell for his

lacquey. A woman enters upon a torrent of abuse, spangled with exhortations to you to get out.

"And never wanted to know her either," said Mrs. Huggins. "But if she had lived, poor lady, she would have taught her daughter better. I was not born yesterday, miss. I can see through a brick wall as far as most people, and I consider your conduct a disgrace to a Christian household. A young nobleman in the rank of Lord Norwich has his own friends and his own relations, and I have no doubt you know that well enough. I don't intend to have this house disgraced by any such carryings-on. It's bad enough to have the maid-servants leaving in disgrace, as always will happen when you are near the barracks."

At what precise point is human patience to stop? Marcia was not a man. She could not, for instance, knock Mrs. Huggins down. Neither could she enter into a war of words with her. A sneer or sarcasm would have been wasted. Marcia turned on her heel and walked towards the door.

"Miss Conyers!" called out Mrs. Huggins in a somewhat raised tone of voice, partly as if she were afraid that Marcia was going in quest of some deadly weapon, partly in a tone of command, as if she wished to still further impress the occasion. "Miss Conyers, come back at once. I insist! I order you! Do you hear me, Miss Conyers?" But Marcia passed through the door, and shut it after her. And Mrs. Huggins, some very naughty words struggling to her lips, subsided into the easy-chair and wept.

Hysterics were unnecessary, as there was no gentleman present, but she had what the ladies' maid, who surprised her at its conclusion, afterwards described to the other domestics as a real good howl.

Marcia on her part went straight to her room, and packed her two boxes; rang the bell, and ordered that a

cab should be sent for; and so she was fairly on her way to Fräulein Dietz before Mrs. Huggins had recovered from her first burst of sobbing, and had, as the young athletes of the running-path term it, got her second wind.

The cabman drove her to Old Chelsea, where he deposited her and her effects at the door of Fräulein Dietz. He was pleased with his fare, and remarked at the first public-house at which he stopped to "wet" the sum, that he had driven a lady who "*was* a lady." "A spanker," he added solemnly.

Cabmen, to use their own terminology, can "reckon up a fare" pretty accurately. The estimate made by her driver of Marcia was as accurate as had been that one made of her father, and recorded in these pages by a gentleman whose position in life was also "upon the rank."

CHAPTER XVII

Now it so happened that the Fräulein was at home when Marcia arrived. When a man is at home and nothing else to do, and nothing to take him out, he lights his pipe and sits down in the window, or if it is winter, similarly lights his pipe and lies down on the sofa. When a woman has nothing else to do she substitutes tea for the masculine pipe, and, according to the time of the day and the condition of the light, either indulges herself in a novel or else knits mechanically.

Fräulein Dietz was sitting before the fireplace. The tea was actually standing upon the table, and there was nothing to be done after Marcia's boxes had been safely dragged into the hall, except to indulge in a good long chat.

The two were old friends, and talked everything out thoroughly—the ultimate conclusion being that old Mrs. Huggins ought to be ashamed of herself, and that as there was actually a bedroom to let in the house, Marcia had better take it for a week at any rate, and see how things went.

This little business satisfactorily arranged, the two friends had a walk along the quaint old road that leads to Fulham, and in their own way were entirely happy. They did a little shopping. Shopping with ladies is a mild form of excitement, and usually a very harmless one. In a way, indeed, it is positively beneficial, as giving a slight stimulus to trade. Had the two friends been men, they would no doubt have concluded the evening with a brandy-and-soda, and possibly even an hour or a couple of hours at a music-hall.

Marcia and the Fräulein took home a basket of strawberries instead, and soberly discussed them through the long twilight into the hours of gloaming. Over the strawberries the position of affairs was mapped out, and the future of the joint campaign (if an inoffensive partnership in life can so be termed) was definitely settled.

At present there was clearly more than seventy pounds to the good in Marcia's pocket. That would last for some time. Another picture could be got in hand at once. Little pot-boilers were not to be despised, being like little fish, as sweet as they are small. The Fräulien was not alsolutely penniless. Altogether, indeed, the two women had a very cheery prospect before them. For women, happily for themselves and for men too, can live more cheaply than men can, and can economise in a hundred little way of which men are wholly ignorant. I do not desire to enter into the details of this science of personal economy, but its broad facts must be known to everybody.

Before the two ladies retired for the night there was nothing left to be settled, and each of them, I hope, and have reason to believe, slept the sleep of the just. But the next morning was a busy one.

First of all came the letters Marcia had to write. One was to Mr. Huggins, to tell him how and why she had left his roof, and to thank him for all his past kindness. This epistle, by the Fräulein's advice, was registered, addressed in the most clerkly of hands, and directed to the worthy man's office in the city.

It put Mr. Huggins into a very bad temper. If fact he swore at things in general, and when he got home that evening was by no means so agreeable as his better-half could have wished.

The other letter, a somewhat difficult one, was to Lord Norwich. It was to say that she had left Queen's

Gate in consequence of a quarrel with Mrs. Huggins, and was now living with her old governess. She thanked him again for buying her picture; added that she meant to keep hard at her work, and to give all her time to it, and so concluded, not because there was nothing more to be said, but for the very sufficient reason that there was nothing more to be written.

Lord Norwich, when he had finished the letter locked it up in his desk. "She's as good as gold," he said, as he turned the key; "as true as steel, and as plucky as——" Lord Norwich was not in the habit of writing for general readers, or he might have terminated his sentence with some more refined monosyllable than the one he actually selected. But it was distinctly wrong on his part, and indeed petulant, to waste a few more or less vigorous flowers of speech upon Mrs. Huggins. Which he did.

Now there is in Chelsea a delightful little street of which I am not going to give the name; but it is well known to City clerks of good position, literary men and artists in a small way, widows, and single ladies of limited means and other such eligible tenants. I will call it Cherry Tree Walk. It runs as nearly as may be due north and south. All the houses have gardens in the rear, and some of them have even a little patch in front. Others are detached, and boast a poplar or two, or a gnarled elm. Starlings will twitter here under the overhanging eaves, and in summertime the place is so drowsy, that the whistle of the butcher's boy, as he goes his morning rounds, invades the silence as if it were a very war-whoop.

Here our friends picked a little furnished house, and put it in order, and actually went to the expense of a brass-plate for the garden-gate, with MADAME DIETZ, PROFESSOR OF MUSIC, engraved upon it.

"It looks professional, my dear," said the little woman,

"and I am quite old enough to be called Madame, and quite ugly enough too."

It is the first ambition of a young man to live in chambers or lodgings of his own. It is a woman's first ambition to have a house of her own. Her first house is as distinct a step in her existence as years ago were her long skirts, or as is for the schoolboy his own double-barrelled gun.

Where there is a will there are many ways, and Crocus Cottage in a few days became as bright and cheerful and fresh as if the Spring flowers had fallen on it, to the exclusion of the rest of the street.

All that was needed was a servant; and when a homely, trustworthy girl had been found, and the policeman had been spoken to, and tradesmen selected and coals laid in, the Fräulein rubbed her hands and vowed that she felt twenty years younger, and exactly like Robinson Crusoe in his island. Her infectious good temper communicated itself to Marcia, and I do not think that any two women were ever happier.

In a very few days Marcia was at work. There are some exquisite little bits of country scenery in Old Chelsea—a fact of which very few Londoners are aware. There are the gardens of the Apothecaries' Company, which are very quaint, curious and prim; there are charming little nooks to be found in Battersea Park, which is, to my thinking, the prettiest and most natural park in all London. The river is full of life, and rich in colour, and nothing is more easy than to obtain permission to pitch your easel regularly in some secure and sheltered spot. Or, if you go farther afield, all the most beautiful part of Middlesex and Surrey is open to you.

People who go out of London for scenery can hardly know much of the Thames between Old Battersea Bridge and Hampton Court.

And now a very curious little string of events came following each upon the other. Marcia, who had just finished a small picture of barges on the slack tide off the Crabtree, was astonished by a letter requesting a call, which she received from the eminent gentleman, who, according to his own view of the matter, had made her fortune by discovering at a glance exactly the kind of frame it was that her first picture had needed.

He wanted her, he said, to paint him half a dozen small things, all about the same size. She might choose her own subjects. He was in no particular hurry. He would take them as they were done, according to season, opportunity, and so forth. He was commissioned to give the order, and was prepared to state that the price he was willing to offer would be sixty guineas for each picture, provided of course that it was, as it certainly would be, equal to Miss Conyers' rising reputation.

Talk of fortune at once! Why, Marcia was fairly bewildered. The news seemed too good to be true. Could it possibly be the case that Mr. Moss was out of his senses, or was playing a joke upon her? And then she recollected that it was Mr. Huggins who had sent her to Moss, to have her Academy picture varnished and framed. But, she argued with herself, it was absurd to suppose that Mr. Huggins could possibly want a sort of small gallery of pictures from her brush, or that he was sufficiently venturesome to risk the wrath of Mrs. Huggins, if such a purchase on his part were discovered.

She was still very ignorant of the world. It did not occur to her that people act from mixed motives, and that if her pictures had not been honestly worth the money, and if Mr. Huggins had not personally taken a sort of kindly interest in her welfare, which was as much due to her good looks as to her skill with the brush, and very largely due to his own secret annoyance and irritation

at his wife's bad temper, Mr. Huggins would never have thus loosened his purse-strings.

Here, however, was the order. From whom it came did not so much matter. And Marcia set to work upon it in steady earnest.

The days and weeks that followed ran the tranquil course of a mill-stream. Picture after picture was painted, and punctually sent in. The purchase-money was as punctually paid, so that Marcia and the Fräulein were in their little way quite affluent, and became full of small plans and schemes for the future.

It was as well perhaps that this should be so, for the music-lessons had not exactly turned out a mine of wealth, and it was fortunate also that there should be absolutely no ground for anything like forebodings. It is almost impossible to do work of any kind, still less work of the highest kind, unless your mind is at ease.

When you are happy, time flies. When you are busy it flies also. You must look at your watch if you are out fishing or shooting and the sport is good, otherwise you will miss your train, or somehow else get home inconveniently late. If you are hard at work, even upon a mathematical problem, you will be astonished to find how rapidly the minutes have flown. This is why busy people are always contented. It is when time hangs heavy on your hands that you begin to fret, or, as Homer called it, to gnaw at your soul.

Now the Fräulein was always busy. Her whole life was a little atmosphere of activity. Her mental organisation was that of a coral reef, which is always ceaselessly at work, until line by line, and inch by inch, it has grown into an island. Marcia's energy was more concentrated and intense. And so at last, when the Fräulein came in one evening from some small purchases, she was astonished to be pounced upon by Marcia, who seized her by her two shoulders, ran her up to the easel, and called

out with a loud laugh, "There's the last! It must go in to-morrow morning."

"And then?" asked the Fräulein.

"The picture goes in, and we go off."

The Fräulein collapsed into a chair. "Where to?" she gasped.

"Anywhere! anywhere! anywhere!" trilled Marcia. "Pegwell Bay, Athens, Scarborough, St. Petersburg, Malvern, Memphis. Where you please."

"Dieppe is a nice place I have heard," said the Fräulein, "and very healthy."

"We will start to-morrow," said Marcia, "and leave the picture on our way to the station." And this they actually did. For Marcia was not a fussy young lady. She rather resembled Lord Clyde, who when asked how soon he would be ready to start for India and quell the mutiny if he could, replied that he should be ready that afternoon.

The Fräulein, on the other hand, was a marvel of neatness and precision—qualities that save time—and would have made a most admirable courier, had she been suddenly called upon to fill such a post at a moment's notice. And so within a very few hours the last picture had been handed to Mr. Moss, a sergeant of police with a responsible wife was in charge of the house, and Marcia and the Fräulein were listening to the dull, measured beat of the engines, as the vessel steamed out into the Channel and began to feel the tide.

It was for each of them a most delightful change. There is nothing more pleasant for a short time, at any rate, than the methodical activity and busy regularity of a well-managed passenger steamer. There are drawbacks, of course. There is a smell of grease from the engines. There are passengers whose misery cannot escape your notice, and make you feel as if your own comfort and pleasure were somehow a selfish thing, and almost par-

taking of the nature of sin. It may rain violently, or you may for some other reason be confined below deck against your will.

None of these things, however, troubled either Marcia or her companion. They were, in fact, almost sorry when the time came for the disembarkment, and the scrutiny of their baggage.

CHAPTER XVIII

And it is now getting time that I should return to John Douglas, who, when we last took leave of him, was not without reason in an extremely touchy state of temper, from the effects of which Marcia's little letter of thanks for his most kindly and apt present had by no means wholly relieved him.

He settled down to his work, of course. He was a giant at work. It did him good. There are some men who are never really happy or at ease unless they are hard at work. They enjoy a short holiday and are the better for it, exactly as they enjoy their sleep and rise from it refreshed. But to keep them in health, whether of mind or of body, they require continuous and severe employment. There are a few such men among the ranks of our aristocracy. Some of them administer their own estates with remarkable skill and success. Others —these are few—take to science or to travel. There are many men in the army who are there simply because soldiering gives them something to do.

The career of a successful barrister from the Quarter Sessions to the Woolsack does not, as a rule, especially if it be at all truthful, afford pleasant or edifying matter for a biography. In the lives of the Chancellors and of the Lord Chief Justices of England, there is much to make us sad. We find miserable little intrigues and jealousies, and as the history advances a process of gradual hardening or ossification going on in the man's heart.

Even if Campbell was unjust to rivals, as it is pretty certain he was, we may make a large allowance for his

spitefulness and vanity, and shall still not find the picture a pleasant one.

And John Douglas was no exception to a rule under which greater and abler and better men than himself have been included. He became hardened. He lost wholesome pleasure in wholesome enjoyments to which he had once been attached. He practically gave up field sports, not because he was too old for them, or felt his eye growing dim and his nerve failing him, but because he was, without knowing it, becoming fossilised.

Nobody was surprised when he applied for silk and got it, or when, as a mechanical matter of course, he employed a Parliamentary agent in Finsbury Circus, who for a given price found him an eligible constituency, or when after a year or two—not more—he became Sir John Douglas and Solicitor-General. It was all matter of course.

Men envied him his success, but nobody suggested for a moment that it was not thoroughly deserved.

As for the Oakshire episode in his life, it remained in his memory, as did everything else that had ever had a place there. But beyond a memory it was nothing to him. He neither kept it fondly alive nor strove to banish it. It was among the things that had been, and there was an end of it.

One of our greatest Chancellors once visited a cathedral town. He took with him to the afternoon service a young barrister, and specially directed his young friend's attention to a somewhat corpulent lay clerk with a tenor voice distinctly past its prime. "That man," said he, as he left the precincts with his companion, "I once envied more than any other human being in the world. There was a vacancy among the choristers. I was a candidate, and so was he. He was selected. I believe he is a sensible man. If so, and he knew everything, he perhaps would not be anxious after all to change places with me."

'A very shrewd old Baron of the Exchequer in the good

old days expressed a similar opinion. He was walking down the street at York, when the coach with its four horses was pulled up, in the most approved fashion, at the inn-door, and the driver with proper dignity threw his reins to an ostler and leisurely dismounted.

"He's a happy man," said his Lordship emphatically; "nobody dare contradict him. Now look at me. I have to take my seat on the Bench, and have every young whipper-snapper from Quarter Sessions putting me right. I'm sick of it."

Like the Chancellor, John Douglas wondered at his old self and his own past hopes and wishes. Like the learned Baron he was thoroughly dissatisfied with his position.

Sir Hugo, like all selfish people, had worked more mischief than he ever dreamed of, and had utterly spoilt not John Douglas' success in life as measured by any ordinary standard, but his life itself. The story is not a new one. Such things happen every day, and Providence still permits wretched meddlers such as Sir Hugo to make the world miserable in the pursuit of their own petty purposes.

We must console ourselves if we can with the assurance that all things work together for good. But this is a belief that requires a sturdy faith.

"The good man," says Plato, "will be happy even whilst he is being broken on the wheel." "People who tell us this kind of thing," is the trenchant criticism of his greatest pupil, the sage of Stagria, "may mean what they say, or may not. But in either case they are talking nonsense." The remark was unkindly as from a pupil towards his old teacher. But it was the perfection of philosophy, which is only the perfection of common sense.

No man can be happy who is suffering the slow torture of discontent. And no discontent is worse than that which arises when you look back upon a fatal mistake which has

robbed your life of its sunshine. You cannot cheat your own soul by telling yourself that, after all, you have done very well.

Napoleon did very well after he divorced Josephine. But I often fancy he must have been haunted by her memory even when his star seemed to himself and to all Europe at its highest.

Sir John Douglas married, of course. The marriage was a most prudent one. People called it an admirable match. The lady was the second daughter of a Law Lord. She was considered handsome; she had considerable natural ability, which in its way had been improved by education, and she had thirty thousand pounds. She had also a strong will, and could hold her own. Douglas was no prodigy in her eyes, and he very soon became aware of the fact.

Many a man has been spoilt beyond hope by the over-worship of his wife. But on the whole such a fate is happier than that of the man whose wife gives him plainly to understand that in her opinion their union has been a most suitable one, and from its practical aspect a remarkably good thing for him. Consequently John Douglas chafed, and was happiest perhaps when dining alone at the Athenæum, or preparing in his study an argument which would afterwards, he knew, be quoted as of quasi-judicial authority. His life was dull. Sympathy had no longer an existence for him.

"Life," said Heraclitus of Ephesus, "is no better than death."

"Then why do you live on?" asked a busybody.

"Because," said Heraclitus, "death is no better than life."

And in this frozen frame of mind Sir John Douglas lived on.

Now if it had not been for the meddlesome and wholly selfish manœuvring of Sir Hugo, Douglas would almost

certainly have married our heroine, and it is almost equally certain that the marriage would have ended in that solid happiness which after all is the best. Marriages of affection pure and simple are all very well in their way. I have nothing to say against them, and I suppose they will continue to the end of time. But marriages of good, sound common sense combined with that particular kind of affection that deepens later in life into regard and respect of the highest kind, are the best of all—best in their inception, and best in their results.

That Marcia did not become the wife of John Douglas was entirely the fault of Sir Hugo, and if we look about us we shall find that nearly all the unhappiness in this world is brought upon people, not through their own selfishness, but through the selfishness of others, and more especially of their own relations.

What had Sir Hugo, for instance, ever done for Marcia to give him the slightest claim upon her gratitude, or to warrant him for a moment in attempting to control the course of her life for his own selfish purposes? Every day we see girls sacrificed hopelessly in this manner. Every day relations interfere in matters upon which they have really no moral right to express an opinion. We laugh in England at the idea of the French *conseil de famille;* but it equally exists among ourselves, although it is not formally recognised by the law.

And the lives of those who have allowed this kind of shoddy destiny to influence their carreer, or who have been powerless to prevent its doing so, are too frequently wasted lives in the most unhappy sense of the term.

The worst of one's relations is that they hardly make the pretence of being disinterested. They talk to you, for instance, about what you owe to your family. Now let any man ask himself why young Smith, who wants to be a surgeon and has a distinct genius that way, owes it to his family that he should go into the Church? Why

does his sister owe it to her family that she should marry the banker in her county town whom she personally dislikes, and not the young officer to whom she is really attached, and who is anxious for her sake to exchange into a regiment in India?

In one of Dickens' greatest works, Mrs. Merdle, the wife of the supposed millionaire, tells him sharply that he does not sufficiently consider his duty to society. Mr. Merdle's reply is to the effect, that for years past he has turned himself into a watering-pot, and watered society with gold; and, he adds, he should much like to know what society has ever done for him.

Let any man in his quiet and sound moments ask himself how much he really owes to his relations. He will find, nine times out of ten, that if anything has been done for him, it has been done by his friends—friends whom he has made for himself entirely without the aid of his family, and, as a rule, directly against the advice of its responsible members.

We are often told that a man's worst enemy is himself. On the contrary, a man's worst foes are those of his own household. Leave him to make his own bed, and you will find him quite content to lie upon it. He will not come round with his hat in his hand, unless it be for some absolutely justifiable reason which would give him a claim upon the compassion even of perfect strangers. But we take young people, and play at Providence with them as a child plays at Providence with its dolls. If the result is a moderate humdrum success, we claim the credit. If it be a failure, we ostentatiously wash our hands of the matter, and loudly disclaim our responsibility.

It is considered the proudest jewel upon the matron's brow that she should have married all her daughters well. Notice the phrase, my reader, and analyse it. It is not that she has married them happily, but that she has married them well, which is quite another thing. The phrase

also is that she has married them—as if the matter were one in which they themselves had no voice. In the same way we might put it among the qualifications of a gardener, that he was a remarkably clever potter and bedder-out. But plants are mechanical things, more or less. Human beings are not. Certainly there was nothing mechanical about Marcia. And yet here was old Sir Hugo pottering about with his little flower-pot, and his little potful of loam, and his wretched little empirical views as to temperature, and other essential conditions of healthy plant life. Your gardener does not care for the plant itself a whiff of the coarse tobacco that he burns in your hot-houses to kill insects. What he wants is to take a prize at the next county flower-show. So Sir Hugo, having no other seedling available for his purposes but Marcia, had made up his mind that she should win a prize for him.

He is not the first excellent and wholly unselfish man who has been suddenly snatched away from us before he has had time to complete his good work. Perhaps in a larger sphere of existence, there may be more for us to do than to play at Providence on our own account. After all, Sir Hugo was a very respectable old offender. He was no worse than many other men of his own stamp, and better than some. If he had succeeded in marrying his daughter to Lord Norwich, the matrons from the poorer districts would certainly not have assembled at the doors of the sacred edifice to hoot and yell at him as he left the church—a thing that actually happened to a lady of title in this most Christian country, within the memory of most of my readers. He was, after all, a lazy, indolent old sinner, who, if all his own wishes were first fully satisfied, would probably rather have seen other people round about him happy than not.

This is negative praise; but as far as it goes it may be given ungrudgingly.

CHAPTER XIX

Out of the Grand Rue in Dieppe a number of little streets trickle down, as it were, to the sea. One of them is the Rue Champsfleuris. At its seaward extremity it is flanked on the right hand by the wide wall of an enormous hotel and pension, and on the opposite side by the wall of a large English boarding-school for young ladies. Above these are little shops where they sell charcoal and sausages and bread, and other such small merchandise. The only shop of note in the street sells Bibles, breviaries, rosaries of olive-wood from Gethsemane, book-markers, and Lives of the Saints, while in its window is a crucifix certified to contain a fragment of the *vera crux*. Here Marcia and the Fräulein took up their abode.

They got, at a most reasonable rental, a small room on the *entresol*, and a bedroom above it. And when they had arranged that they were to take all their meals out, with the exception of tea, there was literally nothing left to be done, except to saunter about the decayed old town, and look at the cathedral and the flower-market and the beach.

Dieppe is for such English as frequent it a city of the lotos-eaters. They do nothing, and find their happiness in doing it thoroughly. In the season, no doubt, Americans, and English, and even a certain number of Parisians come to Dieppe to bathe and to enjoy themselves in their own way. Indeed, after the races at Deauville, there is a regular exodus towards the town. The sun shines, and the thrifty people of Dieppe make their money. So in

England, during a very brief period of our summer, even Broadstairs blossoms into life. But out of the season, Dieppe is the sort of place a man would select in which to live cheaply and exactly as he pleased, to write a book, or make an attempt to write one, to avoid harsh and importunate creditors, and generally, for reasons bad, indifferent or good, to bury himself.

To enjoy Dieppe at all out of the season, you must be much such a philosopher as Gilbert White. I doubt, indeed, if even that most estimable of English scholars, naturalists, and parsons would have been fully equal to Dieppe and its worthy inhabitants during the autumnal equinox.

It was now, however, August, and Dieppe was as lively as is Cowes in the regatta month. Had Marcia kept a diary, her entries would have been amusing. The Frenchwomen, especially the Parisians, were an inexhaustible source of enjoyment to her. The Frenchmen amused her almost as much. The children in their fancy costumes were a constant study. The English were of that particular English type which affects Dieppe and Boulogne, and asserts itself by doing as it pleases, in its most obtrusive and offensive manner. So much for Dieppe itself.

But a little inland, amid the most exquisite Norman scenery, lies Arques, and it was at Arques that Marcia, accompanied by the Fräulein, spent the best part of every day. The young lady set to work methodically. She devoted an entire week to studying the scenery, until she had thoroughly got herself into sympathy with its character, and mastered its moods of colour and changes of expression. Then after much strategy in the choice of a situation she set to work upon her new picture.

The Château d'Arques is one that grows upon you. It will make the pursiest stockbroker out of Throgmorton Street feel a sort of twinge of romance to wander under

the old walls, and think vaguely of their history, and of the stories they could tell if they chose, and which would be far more wonderful than those that the *gardien* so glibly pours into the ears of the excursionists to the famous Château. Where the red tomatoes now ripen under the wall, and the ducks and poultry roam unmolested, men in armour once strode heavily to and fro. The empty courtyards were once busy with life. The chambers of state had their stone panelled with oak, which in its own turn was hidden from the eye by rich, heavily-broidered tapestry. To do the ruins of a castle justice, you must in your own mind clothe the dry bones with flesh. And to do this task Marcia's imagination was fully equal. For, indeed, the most resolute minds have as much imagination as have others, and occasionally even more. And it was in this spirit that she set to work upon her picture.

All the elements of success were at last combined. She was not working under any kind of pressure, or even against time. She could do her work in her own way, and according to her own humour, commencing it, discontinuing it, and resuming it, as she pleased. The task was congenial, and more than itself lay in the future beyond it. And above all it was voluntary.

The life of an artist is self-chosen. He is not brought up to it as are bankers, or merchants, or the bulk of business and professional men. Very few artists paint for the sake of money alone. Even Turner, when engaged upon his pictures, and not in bargaining about their price, must have had his happy moments. Marcia herself was probably never so happy as at this particular juncture.

But there is one little point I must not forget, as it lets a light on my heroine's character. Directly, she had profited by her dealings with Mr. Moss, and indirectly, by his stray crumbs of wisdom. So when the day was

not favourable for the great work itself, which was seldom, or when Marcia did not feel in the full vein for it, which was still more seldom, she would occupy herself—I am bound to use the only word open to me—with a little pot-boiler. These pot-boilers go by a bigger title. They are called Studies. Their place in the work of the artist is very much that of scales in the education of the musician. But the musician of eminence does not play the scales in public, and as lawyers would say, for reward in that behalf. He plays them in the solitude of his own room.

Now the studies of an artist, if they find their way into the market, have an appreciable value. An educated taste for Art is far more frequent than a purse of sufficient length to gratify it. But a small picture even unfinished will always command its price, if the painter be well known. Men of mark do not usually sell these things themselves. But their executors do. Men who are not yet recognised as being in the first rank find the pot-boiler a most useful and aptly-named product of their labour. And so, with unceasing industry, the moments in which justice could not be adequately done to the great work itself, were devoted to the manufacture of these most useful and sensible trifles. I may dismiss them by saying that they considerably more than covered all the expenses of the visit to Dieppe, and that five years afterwards they were worth at a public auction prices which to Marcia when she was engaged upon them would have seemed fabulous.

Now while the picture was occupying the hours and the pot-boilers were filling up the moments, a schooner, with the white flag of the Royal Yacht Squadron, threw anchor one night off Dieppe, and next morning at high tide was towed into the harbour. She was of English build, with a deck-house of plate-glass, and with that marvellous neatness and completeness in every arrangement

which serves to remind us how wise Socrates must have been.

Whenever, said Socrates, a man gives his mind to a thing, he does it better than any woman can. Let us take two arts in which women are supposed to employ themselves more especially than in others—cookery and millinery. In each of these men drive them hopelessly out of the field. Now if there is one thing upon which women are supposed to pride themselves more than another it is upon the neatness and beauty of their homes, and more especially of the state chambers. But there is not a boudoir in the world to compare for a moment with the saloon of a yacht that carries a competent steward, nor can any house show a floor equal to a properly holy-stoned deck.

All Dieppe turned out to have a look at the vessel, and of course everybody knew all about her. She belonged to a rich American, who had brought her over from New York to challenge all our English yachtsmen. She was the summer whim of a Russian Grand Duke, and her saloon was an Aladdin's palace. She had been built in San Francisco for a gentleman who had struck oil, and who had brought her across the Pacific through the China Seas and round the Cape of Good Hope, past Gibraltar, and up into the Mediterranean, from whence he was on his way to the English coast, and so to Christiania.

The vessel herself was so exquisite in her lines, so admirably found, so beautiful and complete down to the smallest detail, that none of these conjectures was extravagant in itself, though all were wide of the mark. She was the *Cecilia* of the Royal Yacht Squadron, as the harbour-master could have told these speculators, and she had just brought Lord Norwich over from Cowes.

Lord Norwich himself—only they did not know him

by sight—was comfortably reclining in a deck-chair close by the main hatchway, and occupied with a French novel and a Havannah cigar. He was dressed as an English yachtsman ought to be—that is to say, you would have passed him in the street without noticing anything pronouncedly nautical in his costume.

Frenchmen soon get tired of looking at anything, and the crowd round the yacht melted away. Lord Norwich, indifferent to the interest taken in his vessel and himself, was pulled in the cutter to the landing-place, and thence sauntered leisurely up into the town. It was no mere whim had brought him to Dieppe. He had ascertained with some little trouble that Marcia and the Fräulein had gone there. "I may as well taken a run to Dieppe as to anywhere else," he said. "I would sooner go to Dieppe than to any other place in the world," was what he really thought. "It's a beastly hole," said some of his friends. "So are most places," answered his Lordship, "and I needn't stop unless I like."

As for his steward and his sailing-master they thought nothing. Sailors occasionally assume a meditative air, but it is extremely doubtful whether they ever think.

Lord Norwich had a look along the *Plage*, but Marcia was not there. He explored the somewhat dreary stretch of beach with his binocular, but in vain. Then he thought he would try the Casino. "As likely to be there as anywhere else," he said. So into the Casino he went. There was no concert going on at the moment, neither was there any bathing, as it was either the wrong time of day, or the wrong time of the tide, or perhaps both. Neither was Marcia playing at the *Petits Chevaux* (the proprietors of which amusing game of chance were driving an uncommonly brisk trade), nor eating ices, nor knitting. She was not in the *salon de lecture*, which was dolefully empty. But he found her at last under the

awning, where she was seated with the Fräulein, and most contentedly doing nothing.

As soon as he saw her, Lord Norwich took off his straw hat and stood still. Now, whatever you are doing, if any one walks up towards you and suddenly stands still you are bound to look up. Marcia looked up, and at once broke into a pleasant smile. There was no reason on earth why she should not do so. Then, of course, they shook hands, and then the Fräulein had to be introduced. Lord Norwich, standing easily by them—it is only an Englishman who can stand naturally—began to talk about everything and nothing.

He commenced with a tremendous falsehood, that he had come to Dieppe in his yacht entirely by accident. Then he became violently interested in Arques. He must go over with them if they would let him, and have a look at the place. He had heard of it, of course. It had something to do with Joan of Arc, he believed. No doubt Miss Dietz would put him right if he was wrong. Fräulein Dietz was not quite sure, but she knew that it was a very beautiful castle, and she for her own part preferred it to Pembroke or even to Kenilworth, both of which Lord Norwich no doubt had seen.

Then they got talking about Glastonbury Abbey and the swans, and Furness Abbey where the deadly nightshade grows, and Lord Norwich said that it was one of the few places in England where that sinister-looking plant is to be found. And then when it had been settled that Lord Norwich was to go over with them next day to Arques, it was also arranged that the day after, if it were fine, they should take a run in the *Cecilia* along the coast. Both Marcia and Fräulein were charmed with this idea, each of them having misty notions of the yacht, and believing it to contain unheard-of splendours and luxuries.

Then they began to talk about the Huggins. Lord

Norwich, in his blunt way, was very glad that Marcia had left Queen's Gate. Marcia owned that her life with them had at the last become intolerable, but was careful to put in a kind word for the head of the household, and frankly told the story of how much she owed the warm-hearted old stockbroker; and how, if it had not been for him, she would not now have been in France.

Lord Norwich profoundly observed that City men were very often uncommonly good fellows, and that he himself enjoyed a City dinner immensely, always excepting the Mansion House itself, where the cookery was atrocious. He had dined once with the Goldsmiths, not at one of their big dinners, but at a select gathering of the Warden, the Vice-Warden, the Prime Warden, and their friends; and the plate was actually triple gilt, and a good deal of it solid gold. As for the amount they spent in charity it was a dozen times what they spent in entertainments, and for the life of him he failed to see why the Radicals could not let them alone.

As for Mr. Huggins, he intended as soon as she returned to England to improve his acquaintance. With regard to Mrs. Huggins he could only say that he was sorry for her husband, who worked hard when he did work, and deserved a better time of it when he got home. Then the Huggins family dropped out of the conversation, and before long they all three found themselves sauntering down to the harbour.

When they reached that part of the quay where the *Cecilia* was lying, Marcia and the Fräulein had a succession of astonishments. There is nothing so bewildering to any one who sees it for the first time as the exquisite order and dainty perfection of a yacht in which its owner takes a pride and can afford to gratify his whim.

The little gangway was thrown out, and they found themselves on a deck which had that morning been religi-

ously holy-stoned till it shone like polished parquet. The sails and ropes were faultlessly clean, the masts had just been scraped, and the funnel repainted. The brass nails and the binnacle were as perfectly in order as if they were costly instruments from an optician's window. There was a small deck cargo of coal in white canvas sacks, with leather straps and handles. There was the deck-house with its plate-glass windows and velvet fittings and spring-blinds.

Then, of course, they had to see the saloon, and to look down the companion into the engine-room, where they could see machinery as scrupulously clean as if it were part of some gigantic watch which a grain of dust might throw out of gear. On the deck were the delightful P. and O. lounges with their arms doing duty for small tables. The wheel was covered up in white canvas. All round it, and upon the roof of the deck-house, and here and there on stands against the bulwarks, the sailing-master had ranged flowers in pots; bright red geraniums contrasted with the yellow calceolaria, and the deliciously-scented heliotrope.

They went forward to inspect the windlass, and when they turned and found their way back to the deck-house, the steward, radiant in navy blue, gilt buttons, and white waistcoat, stood at the door wherein he had arranged a little banquet that might have satisfied the censorship of Bignon himself—hot-house fruits, prawns, potted meats, champagne in ice, quaint sweetmeats, and in the centre of the small table an ingenious fountain that spurted up a tiny jet of rosewater into a basin filled with cut flowers.

It is a solemn fact, but not to my mind at all a painful or even an unpleasant one, that women, especially the kind of women whom men like and who deserve that men should like them, are as fond of the nice things of this world as is an Eton schoolboy, or even an ecclesiastical

dignitary of high position. I could give reasons for this. Men always celebrate a big occasion with a big feed. When they make a *coup* they usually invite their friends to dinner. But a big dinner for itself, and without an occasion to give it sufficient reason, bores them.

At the best clubs in London men who can afford themselves every luxury habitually dine off a little soup and fish, the joint of the hour, with mashed potatoes and a pint of wine. If my Lord Steyne or Mr. Goldmore the banker were to go into one of his clubs and order himself a dinner of four or five courses, the waiters would mention the matter to one another, and would all wonder whether anything had gone wrong with him.

But a woman is *gourmet* by her very nature. Adam would never have wanted anything better than a plain potato. It was Eve who beguiled him with a Ribston pippin. Marcia and the Fräulein were true women after all, and the steward of the *Cecilia* felt a proud man when he saw how his efforts were appreciated.

Lunch and ices over there was a new surprise. For instead of the gangway being run out to the pier, a companion was lowered on the waterside, and at her foot lay the long-boat, with four bluejackets on the thwarts and the sailing-master in the stern-sheets.

The boat herself was as marvellously complete as the yacht, and in her they shot with a quick stroke out of the harbour-mouth, past the lighthouse and round the pier, and so dashed along the shore until they reached the Casino itself. The crew of the *Cecilia* were picked men, and the little craft darted through the water and brought up at the Casino with that finish, down to the minutest detail, which is the perfection of seamanship.

"So that is Lord Norwich," said the Fräulein to Marcia, when that young nobleman had bade them good-bye at their door. "So that is Lord Norwich. Well, I can only say that I have the best opinion of him, and that I

cannot congratulate you, my dear Marcia, upon the way you have treated him."

"He has no reason to complain of any ill-treatment upon my part, Fräulein Dietz."

"Perhaps not. But can't you see how he loves you? Why, my dear, that man would go to his death for you. Surely he deserves something in return."

"I wish you would not talk about it, Fräulein. It is not an agreeable subject to me. I am very sorry for Lord Norwich if he has set his mind upon me. I do not, however, think that at all likely. As I told you, we had a thorough understanding at St. Austell's Towers, and I am confident that he regards the matter in the same light as I do."

"And I am confident that he does not."

"If you are right, Fräulein, it is not my fault. I cannot help it if I am unable to reciprocate his affection. You would not have me marry without caring for him. That is, without caring for him as I ought to. And I hate the idea of marriage. I don't want to marry any one."

"You are an extraordinary girl, Marcia. Why, that man would make your life one delirium of happiness. He is young, he is noble, he is honest, he is handsome, and he is rich. What in heaven's name more do you want?"

"You don't understand, my dear Fräulein."

"No, my dear, I do not."

CHAPTER XX

EARLY next morning they started for Arques. Lord Norwich had a habit aptly described by vulgar Englishmen in a phrase of three words. He liked to do things well. Aristotle, in the profoundest treatise on moral philosophy that the world has ever yet had from an uninspired pen, exalts this art of doing things well, or as they ought to be done, to the rank of a high moral virtue.

If you are a poor man, he says, you had better not ask your friends to dinner at all. They will quite understand your apparent negligence, and sympathise with you. But if you are to ask them to dinner, you must give them an entertainment that does credit to yourself, and is a compliment to them.

If you overdo the thing, you are purse proud. If you attempt it and fail, you are a snob, like Thackeray's poor dear Major Ponto. You must take the middle course—the *aurea mediocritas* of Horace.

Lord Norwich was a gentleman—which is much better than being a nobleman. He hunted all over Dieppe, and actually got together a very serviceable team of Normandy greys and a presentable English coach. Inside he stowed the lunch, or rather had it stowed. On the back-seats were his steward and one or two of the crew held deserving of an outing. You can never have too many sailors about you. Apparently the most indolent of men, they are in reality the most brisk and active.

Marcia and Lord Norwich had the box. Behind them was the Fräulein with the yacht's captain, who respectfully perched himself at the extreme edge of the seat,

where he sat in silence with his feet hanging over the road, and looking for all the world like a mast-headed middy of somewhat advanced age.

Dieppe turned out to see the English Milord who steered his own yacht, and could drive his own four-in-hand. The Normandy people are sympathetic. It does them good to see others happy. The veterans among them did not approve of the start. They had expected that Lord Norwich would distribute a few oaths all round as from an *arrosoir*, crack his whip till he woke the echoes, and start at a full gallop.

Instead of all this he started at a slow trot, keeping his team well together. So they voted the thing tame, and sagely remarked to one another that he did not take a proper pride in himself. It is a pretty journey from Dieppe to Arques. Probably most of my readers know it. They rattled along past rich meadows where the cattle stood knee-deep in grass, and over quaint bridges beneath which trout-streams pleasantly rippled; and the villagers turned out to look at them, and the men at work by the roadside and in the fields shaded their eyes with their hands, and stopped to gaze; and so at last they clattered merrily into Arques itself, and pulled up in the most approved fashion before the leading inn in that historical village.

The horses were taken out, and the little village crowd dispersed. Then came lunch, and after lunch was over, Marcia, accompanied by Lord Norwich and the Fräulein, proceeded at once to her usual position, and, without a moment's delay, recommenced her work. The Fräulein produced some complicated knitting. Lord Norwich thrust his hands into his pockets and looked on.

Now it so happened that on that particular day the sun had, as on every other day, its accustomed apparent motion. The Fräulein, whose blood had circulated more quickly when she was younger, shifted her position with

the sun, and at last was fairly out of earshot. Marcia went on painting. Lord Norwich went on looking over her shoulder.

It was a lovely day; but his lordship did not seem to feel his way to say as much. The picture was a remarkably good one. But then if he had ventured on that observation it would have looked as if he were paying the ordinary stereotyped compliment. Of painting in its technicalities he was as profoundly ignorant as of cat's-cradle or the differential calculus. At last, however, to tell the story in his own words, he began to pull himself together.

"I think I shall like this picture, Miss Conyers, even better than your Academy one. May I ask permission, so to say, to become the owner of it now?"

"Of course you may, if you like. But I must finish it first. And then I must ask you to let it be exhibited. And we must be horribly mercenary over the matter, and get somebody to fix the proper price for us—somebody who doesn't care a bit one way or the other, but will give us what is called the auction value. You see I am getting learned in all the minor mysteries of my art. I suppose some hundred or so views of Arques are painted every season, and mine will be one among them."

Then she stopped and laughed. "I won't sell it at all, Lord Norwich. I will be as obstinate as that vicious old Turner, or that horrible Sibyl with her books. Let me finish the picture in my own way, and you shall have it. I like it. I have been very happy over it for many hours, and I simply refuse to sell it at all."

And then she began to fill in some clusters of wall-flower and stock on one of the crumbling towers. This little work of detail required a number of colours, so that she had to consult her palette very closely.

Lord Norwich was silent for a minute. He looked at the picture. Then he looked at his boots. Apparently

he found some inspiration in them, for he drew a long breath and began to speak.

"I wish you would give me the picture, Miss Conyers. You would make me just the very happiest man in the world. Only what I want is—I mean I wish—that is to say, I want you to give me something else along with it. I don't want to give you pain, or even to trouble you. I know what worry you must have had these last few months. And I am afraid that I am troubling you. I would sooner be off at once for the North Pole, or the Fiji Islands. But do let me ask you to give me the picture and yourself as well. I can't say anything more, and it's very difficult to say this. But if you could only just give me the idea that I had some sort of a chance—only a chance—I would wait any time. It's no use writing about these kind of things. Can't you tell me that there is some kind of hope for me? I shall be content if it is ever so indistinct. Say that, and I will stop here, or I will go away, or I will do anything you tell me to do. I feel it's no good going on. But I do assure you, Miss Conyers, you can make me. I could do something worth doing with you to guide me, and up to now I can't help feeling that my life has been wasted. I have had heaps of opportunities, and I have nothing to show for them. But I could try to be worthy of you, and I would try, with with all my heart and soul."

Marcia laid down her brush, which until now she had kept in her hand, and clasped her knees. Then, after a few seconds of silence, she found words.

"I cannot do what you ask me, Lord Norwich; it would not be right. Nor would it be fair to you if I did. I never had a brother, and you seem to me, and always have seemed, more like a brother than anything else. But I cannot say more than that. The world is large, and time is long. There are some things that are secrets to oneself. I cannot tell you my secrets. They are not

many. But I do not mind telling you what I expect to do. I mean to go on quietly with my work, exactly as if nothing had ever passed between us. And I am very, very grateful to you, because I know you have been speaking the truth. And if ever it lies in my poor power to show my gratitude, rest assured that you will not find me unmindful of all your kindness. I shall always look on you and on my dear Fräulein as my two best friends —indeed almost my only friends. For I am not likely to make others. Look! The sun is setting, and the colours are all becoming purple grey. You must help me to pack up, Lord Norwich. There is nothing more to be done to-day, or said."

So they packed up, and the easel and painting implements, and the picture itself, securely fastened into the deal-box, were deposited for the night with the old lady at the castle, who acted as their custodian; and then they strolled down the hill into the village.

At the door of the little inn the horses were tossing their heads and pawing their feet in anxiety to get back; and it was hardly a minute before they were rattling merrily along the really beautiful road.

Lord Norwich drove his best, and the great iron-grey Normandy horses, although unaccustomed to the touch of an English hand, felt at once they had got their master. At Marcia's door all three got down, and there was a minute or two devoted to the interchange of pleasant farewells. Then the vehicle lumbered off to its stables, the two women with a final shake of the hand went into their house, and Lord Norwich pausing to light a cigar strode down towards the Hôtel Royal.

He scarcely tasted a morsel of the excellent dinner provided for him at that establishment, and paying his bill made his way to the harbour. On board the yacht he impatiently threw off his clothes and tumbled into his cot. The cabin-lamp shed a soft mellow light over the chamber,

and everything was hushed except the slight splash of the water in the harbour. Now and then some one from shore would hail a vessel, or the silence would be broken by the shriek of a gull soaring overhead, or by the measured pulse of oars. But beyond this all was still, and Lord Norwich lay in his cot and occupied himself wtih thinking things over.

Certainly Marcia did not dislike him. That, his own common sense could tell him without any vanity. He was equally sure that she perfectly believed all he had said. If so, then why on earth should she not marry him? And the more he considered this question, the more difficult he found it to arrive at any practical and satisfactory solution of it.

Nine men out of ten would have resolved to give the whole matter up then and there, and to let the young lady go her own way. Lord Norwich happened to be the tenth man, and he made up his mind to see the thing out, and he knew thoroughly what it all meant. But he determined to choose his own time, and he fully decided to leave Dieppe at once.

All Englishmen are obstinate, and he was, most certainly, no exception to the general rule. "There is time to spare, anyhow," he said to himself, "and there is a good deal of virtue in time. 'Time and I against any two,' Napoleon used to say. We will see what the old gentleman can do for me. There is no other fellow in the case, I am sure. If there is, why should she not marry him at once? And if there is no one else, my chance may very likely get the better for a little keeping. At all events the prize is worth a waiting game." And this concise summary of the situation his lordship emphasised with a little strong language, after which he turned round in his cot and fell asleep as soundly as any young man need.

Marcia, on her part, had a few words—actually a few

words—with the Fräulein. That excellent lady thought Marcia very foolish, obstinate, and full of false pride, and did not scruple to tell her so. Marcia was of opinion that the matter was one in which she had a right to judge for herself. The Fräulein opined that nobody was infallible in this world, and that it was always better to listen to reason. Marcia retorted that she intended to live her own life, that she would not sacrifice it for anybody, that she had considerable respect for Lord Norwich; but that things were best as they were, and that the world as a whole would get on a deal better if people would not take it upon themselves to interfere with the affairs of others, and attempt to guide their destinies when they were wholly inadequate to the task.

The Fräulein, with the most aggravating assumption of weakness, replied that she had not the least intention for a moment of presuming to play the part of Providence to Marcia, who no doubt was perfectly equal to the task of managing her own affairs. It was Lord Norwich in whom the Fräulein was interested; he was very good; he was very warm-hearted; he was thoroughly sincere. He was just, fearless, generous, good-natured almost to a fault, and she was sorry for him.

"You plead his cause so eloquently, my dear Fräulein," Marcia snapped out, "that it is a pity you do not marry him yourself."

This, of course, was rude and wrong. Fräulein Dietz took up her candle and lit it.

"I repeat, Marcia, that you are not yourself in this matter. For the first time in my life I see you thinking nothing of other people. The happiness of Lord Norwich is just as important a matter as your own, and you have no right whatever to treat it lightly or recklessly. I shall begin to think that after all you want to pivot the world round yourself; and I should be very sorry to have to believe that of you."

Having discharged this volley, the Fräulein felt her courage fail her, and she made a precipitate retreat to her own room.

Marcia was actually too tired with all that had taken place in the day to indulge herself with any more thinking. "It is no good," she said to herself, "turning matters over when you have thoroughly made up your own mind." And with this reflection she blew out her candle.

The reflection was a sound one, so far as it went. But, like all such general statements, it needed modification. For, in the first place, it was extremely doubtful whether Marcia really had made up her mind, or whether she was only under the impression that she had done so, which is of course a very different thing. And, in the second place, as the Fräulein had said, we are none of us infallible, and it does not follow because we have thoroughly made up our minds, that it is not sometimes as well to reconsider the matter.

As for mere trifles it is best, of course, to dispose of them for once and for all, and then to rank them inexorably with the things which had been. But the very reason for acting in this way is in itself a proof that great matters are not to be decided in a moment. We toss the little trifles out of the way in order that our mind may be free to concentrate itself upon large matters. To omnipotence and omniscience, no doubt, the hairs of our head are numbered. But man has other matters to think of than the number of his hairs.

There came one day to Confucius a young mandarin who asked him if he knew the number of the stars. Confucius replied that he troubled himself with things that were nearer to him than the stars. Upon this the young gentleman politely expressed his desire to be informed how many hairs there were in Confucius's pigtail. Hereat the sage lost patience, and answered angrily that he neither knew nor cared.

Next morning, almost as soon as the sun was up, Lord Norwich swung himself out of his cot and set to work on a letter to Marcia. A letter is often a most troublesome thing. Solicitors, and other—let me say—men of business, are perfectly aware of this. If they want to keep you waiting off and on, to suit their purposes, they always say, "Write me a letter, and set out your views and wishes fully."

As a rule, the client is hopelessly unequal to this task. If he is equal to it, and sends a business-like letter saying exactly what he wants, and upon what terms he is willing to have it done, he gets a reply to the effect that "his favour is duly to hand, and shall have immediate consideration."

It has been said that it takes an honest man to write a good letter; anyhow, the converse of the proposition is usually true. Here is Lord Norwich's letter to Marcia:

"DEAR MISS CONYERS,— I deeply regret your determination, but will not now, at any rate, attempt to argue it with you.

"I shall not change my own mind, as time will show you. There are many years yet to come, and things do not always turn out either as we wish or as we expect.

"I shall sail to-day for the north—Scotland or Norway, as the wind may suit—and as I want to make sure that this reaches you, my sailing-master brings it.

"We shall be certain to meet again, and it is a sincere pleasure added to life to know that we shall always do so as true friends. Beyond this always consider me as a brother, if you should need a brother's services. Fortunately the tide is making, or I might be tempted to write more.

"Kindest regards to Fräulein Dietz,

"Always your most sincere friend,

"NORWICH."

The sailing-master took the letter up, and, pursuant to instructions, waited until he was assured that Miss Conyers had got it, his orders being that it needed no answer. Then he reported himself on board, and steam was up in no time, and the hawsers were cast off, and the *Cecilia* glided out of the old harbour, with the white ensign of the Squadron at her stern. The last that Marcia saw of her through her glasses was a thin streak of smoke on the blue horizon.

Next day Marcia went as usual to Arques with the Fräulein, but the picture somehow did not get on as well as usual. It was a bad day for colour; and I am a little afraid that Marcia and Miss Dietz had some sort of difference of opinion, which unsympathetic and coarse-minded people might almost have termed a row.

Lord Norwich, for his part, cursed his luck, and made a solemn resolution to dismiss the whole matter from his mind for the present; having done which he thought of nothing else for the remainder of the day, and in fact could hardly keep himself from turning the *Cecilia's* nose back again to Dieppe.

The Greeks of old called night the kindly one; and he was not sorry when night came.

"After all," he said, "I suppose there is some one thing or other which every fellow wants to make him happy, and which his hard luck has put beyond his reach. Who the devil am I that I should be any exception to the rule? It's hard, though, all the same." Many men, with an immense reputation for philosophy, could not have summed up the situation so concisely.

CHAPTER XXI

A FEW evenings only after the departure of the *Cecilia*, Marcia and the Fräulein found themselves in the salon of the Casino. A capital band was playing its best, and the gleaming parquet was crowded with dancers.

Marcia and her old friend were looking on. It is always pleasant to look on at dancing, even though you may not dance yourself, although you may be fond of dancing, but unable to join the crowd on the floor for want of a partner to your choice, or for some other sufficiently cogent reason.

Suddenly while thus occupied, Marcia became aware that a gentleman was waiting to speak to her, and looking at him she recognised Mr. Quillett, the second partner of the eminent firm which had for many years conducted Sir Hugo's business and enjoyed his confidence, or to use Mr. Quillett's own phrase, listened to his lies for reward in that behalf.

Mr. Quillett, with the happy assurance of a prosperous solicitor, plunged at once into conversation. He was going to England to-morrow. Could he execute any commission for Miss Conyers? He hoped he saw Miss Conyers well. Perhaps he might be permitted to say that she was looking remarkably well. Might he congratulate her most sincerely on her most brilliant success at the Academy? He had seen the picture himself, and although almost entirely ignorant of art, had admired it immensely. It was, if he might say so, lifelike in the extreme, and he had heard from the highest authority that it had secured her a reputation almost unparalleled for so young

an aspirant to fame. In fact, Sir Humphrey Courteley, the leader of the Parliamentary Bar, and himself a very distinguished amateur, had said so much in so many words in Mr. Quillett's hearing, and had declared it was a shame that the Royal Academicians should not admit ladies within their magic circle.

"They are jealous, Mr. Quillett," he had said; "they are jealous. Look at Rosa Bonheur; look at Lady Butler. The women, when they take to painting in earnest, beat the men hollow. So they do on the stage, as honourable and as good a profession as my own. So they do in music. Look at Rachel and Sarah Bernhardt. Look at Rejane."

"And I believe he was right, Miss Conyers. In fact I am sure he was," added the old gentleman.

Marcia acknowledged these compliments with that amount of courtesy which she considered their sincerity to deserve, and Mr. Quillett then turned to business.

He particularly wished to introduce her to a gentleman, he might say, or indeed he ought to say, a nobleman, who was an old member of Boodles', and intimately acquainted with her father. It was Lord Henry Forrester, brother of the Duke of Worcester, and a great enthusiast in all matters of art. Might he do so?

It was difficult to say no. Seated in the *salon* of the Casino, she could hardly plead that she was still in mourning for Sir Hugo, and there was no excuse available that would not have been an obvious falsehood, so she had to say yes.

Lord Henry was a man considerably above the average height, and admirably built. He gave you the idea that in his time he had rowed in the University eight, and that he could still hold his own at any athletic pursuit. He was distinctly handsome, even from a man's point of view. His hair had here and there a few silver streaks, as if to prove that its prevalent jet black was not the pro-

duct of art. His heavy moustache was cut short, and his cheeks were closely shaved; for he had features of which any man might have been proud, and was perfectly aware of the fact.

There was no stiffness as of military drill about him, nor on the other hand any slovenliness or peculiar knack of gait, such as that by which we can tell at once the man who can do nothing at all, and feels his limbs a difficulty to him, or on the other hand the man who is always in the saddle or always at sea, and cannot hide the fact. But all Lord Henry's movements told of strength and skill in manly arts. You would probably have conjectured, and not without good reason, that he could take half thirty and a bisque, and hold his own with a professional tennis-player.

Lord Henry was an accomplished talker. On this point Frenchmen deceive themselves. They imagine that they are the best talkers in the world. On the contrary, a well-bred English gentleman has not his equal in conversation, for he is, as a rule, utterly unconscious, or, if conscious, can entirely conceal the fact.

In a very few minutes he had made fully as much progress in Marcia's good opinion as he could have wished, and perhaps even more than he had expected, for he was a novelty to her. He spoke with proper respect, but with no affectation of deep sorrow of his old friend, Sir Hugo, his brilliant abilities, his comparatively retired life, and his sudden death. Then he turned to art, and without at all flattering Marcia, enabled her at once to see that he understood precisely the strong points in her work, and thoroughly appreciated them.

Then he began to tell her of places which he had seen himself, and which she ought to see—of Sicily, of the Riviera, of the Levant, and of California, where the climate, sky, the sun of the Mediterranean, are united with the grandeur of nature, that is as far beyond any-

thing in the old world, as are the immense peaks of the Andes above the ranges of the Alps and Apennines.

It was impossible not to listen to him, and impossible not to be charmed. He spoke of what he knew. He spoke with what, if not genuine feeling, was at any rate the perfection of art, and he had a peculiar and irresistible grace of manner.

Nor was all this mere acting. Put the character of the man aside, and he was as nearly perfect as a man need be—handsome, as I have said, highly educated, and with a genuine love of nature and of art. Such men, when the opportunity has come to them of using their power, have often left their mark on the history of the world. Cæsar Borgia impressed even Machiavelli. Tiberius, of whom Tacitus writes with a distinctly personal hatred, was a magnificent administrator, and the most accomplished member of his own Court. Charles Edward Stuart has never had justice done him. We might come nearer to our own day. There must have been some sort of magic about Don Carlos apart altogether from his heraldic claims, that secured him the staunch allegiance he undoubtedly commanded and inspired.

Marcia had of course introduced Lord Henry to the Fräulein, who, forming her own opinion at once, said as little as possible, and in fact succeeded admirably in playing the part of a stupid over-the-middle-age woman, rather tired at being dragged about as chaperon, and extremely indifferent to everything that was going on. In reality the old lady was as wide-awake as a cat when she pretends to go to sleep in the sun on a balustrade commanding the terrace where the pigeons and sparrows are picking up the crumbs that have been thrown for them.

The good lady knew her way about, and although her own life had been entirely innocent of love passages, yet understood men thoroughly—perhaps all the more thoroughly for that very reason.

At last Lord Henry suggested the terrace, the room was getting stifling, he said; and somehow, before she knew it, Marcia found herself on his arm, and out under the moonlight in the delicious evening air. This was the man's opportunity, and he knew how to put it to advantage. To tell the truth, he fascinated Marcia, for the very simple reason that he was more than her match, and in fact more than the match of any man whom she had ever come across. Old Sir Hugo, with all his little arts, not to call them dodges, would have been a mere child in his hands. John Douglas would have had the worst of it in crossing rapiers with him, and would have lost his temper and shown as much, and so with his temper have also lost his game. No good lawyer, that is to say no sound lawyer, is ever a good man of the world. Lord Norwich would have had a better chance, having perfect control over himself, and seeing at once with what manner of man he had to deal. But even he would have found himself outwitted, and have had to choose between conscious defeat or open quarrel.

For myself I do not know how one is to deal with men of this stamp—experienced as Ulysses, clever as Voltaire, and unscrupulous as the first Napoleon. The only thing to do is, if you are where it can be done, and are sure of yourself, to call them out and kill them as unhesitatingly as you would kill a wild beast. And this may seem at the present stage of my story to be what Americans term "a big order." So perhaps the story itself had better go on, and make out my justification.

Out on the terrace Lord Henry talked apparently of everything under the sun, and yet somehow made Marcia distinctly understand that he was as much taken by her as any man of his age and wisdom could be. Language, it has been said, is given you that you may hide your thoughts. You may carry this idea a step farther. The most skilful user of language is the man who, while talk-

ing apparently of nothing in particular, makes you understand of what it is that he is thinking. And Lord Henry was a man of this type. He was a master of the art. A shorthand writer might have taken down every word he said, and if the transcript had been read out to a British jury, the twelve good men and true would have considered it an ordinary conversation somehow above their own heads, and have laughed to scorn the idea that it had any undercurrent of meaning. But the undercurrent was there, although the jury would probably not have detected it, even if they had been actually listening. They would only have thought that his lordship was an uncommonly clever and well-informed man who expressed himself uncommonly well and pleasantly.

Marcia, frank, straightforward, and honest as the day, was so charmed that the moments flew, and it was not until the band ceased the final galop that it occurred to her to look at her watch. She had actually been away from the Fräulein more than an hour.

Lord Henry was far too wise to remonstrate against her wish to rejoin the Fräulein. They found that estimable lady waiting their arrival with a peculiarly grim expression of countenance, quaintly at variance with her amiable features, and, as Marcia could see at once, distinctly out of temper.

"Shall you be here to-morrow morning?" asked Lord Henry, in the most natural of tones as he handed over his charge to Miss Dietz.

"We go to Arques to-morrow, you remember, Marcia," said Miss Dietz, interrupting incisively.

But for once in a way Marcia declined to accept the Fräulein's suggestion.

"Oh yes," she answered, "I think I shall come down here to-morrow, and freshen myself again with looking at the sea. One can easily get into a groove over painting, and that is neither good for the picture nor for oneself.

My father used to say that regular players never play unless they feel in the vein, and take their holidays almost religiously, about the only trace of self-restraint they possess. Yes, I shall be here to-morrow, Lord Henry."

"I shall look out for you," said Lord Henry.

With this they parted, but when the two ladies were fairly home there ensued what schoolboys profanely term a kick-up. You may call it what you will, for it has many names. "Shindy" perhaps best expresses what occurred, as it conveys the idea of misunderstanding between friends, followed by explanation and reconciliation.

The Fräulein spoke her mind, and stuck to her guns. Marcia was equally frank and equally obstinate. The Fräulein told her young friend she was a child, and that her vanity had been played upon. Marcia retorted the Fräulein had better at once call her a fool, and added something about there having been wise men before Solomon, and brave men before Agamemnon.

The elder lady said that she no more pretended to be Solomon than to be the Queen of Sheba, but that there were some things sufficiently simple to need no Solomon for their elucidation. And she added, that you cannot talk the moon out of the sky, which was appropriate enough, but not exactly original. Marcia replied that if any one were equal to the task of talking the moon out of the sky, with or without a sufficient cause for such an interference with the ordinary course of nature, the person in question would be Miss Dietz. And with this Parthian dart she marched off to her room.

As she was only angry she was soon asleep. But the poor Fräulein was anxious as well as angry, and her sleep was not what that of the just ought to be, and the proverb declares it.

CHAPTER XXII

For some days the breach between Marcia and the Fräulein showed no signs of mending. Each lady, the young as well as the old, had a certain show of reason for considering herself the aggrieved party, and holding that she had been very badly treated.

From the Fräulein's point of view Marcia was forward and ungrateful. "I have been like a mother to her," said the little woman to herself. "No mother could have loved her daughter better. She knows that all I do and say is for the very best. And now, instead of even talking things over with me, she pushes me on one side as if I had some motive or object of my own in the matter. She might at least give me credit for meaning well. And she treats me as if I were getting into my second childhood. It's too bad!" and the poor little old lady comforted herself with a good, honest, Teutonic burst of crying.

Marcia, on the other hand, was in an extreme state of irritation and wounded dignity. "Fräulein Dietz," she angrily thought, "was still no more than a nursery governess, with very many estimable qualities perhaps; but a nursery governess all the same. She would like, I believe, to send me to bed without my dinner, and to diet me upon the bread of affliction and the water of affliction. It's perfectly intolerable. First she lectures me about Lord Norwich, and now she is lecturing me again about Lord Henry. Who on earth is Fräulein Dietz that she should be infallible? If she did not really mean well her interference would be downright impertinence, and I don't

see for my part that meaning well is always to be taken as an excuse. It's your people who mean well that make all the mischief in the world. And really the Fräulein is becoming quite a nuisance."

And then I am sorry to add that Marcia instituted a series of very irreverent and sarcastic comparisons between the Fräulein and various more or less grotesque objects of nature; such as an old hen cackling after a brood of ducklings which have joyfully taken to the water; Mrs. Partington defying the Atlantic with her mop; and a humble-bee imprisoned under an inverted glass and indignant at a confinement the nature of which he is wholly unable to fathom.

It was thus evident that there was considerable want of forbearance, not to say of charity, upon each side, or that in the homely parlance of domestic life, the fat was in the fire. And the quarrels of women are worse than those of men. For when a couple of men have quarrelled and desire to make matters up, neither of them insists, or in fact expects, that the other should humbly own himself to have been in the wrong; whereas a woman, before she will forgive you, insists that you shall walk under the yoke barefooted, your hands bound behind you, and your head submissively bowed.

Now it was not likely that the Fräulein would submit to indignities of this kind to please Marcia, or that Marcia on her side would submit to them to please the Fräulein. So that matters were at a deadlock.

Thus have I often seen in some narrow lane or alley in the City two heavily-laden vans meet in different directions, and the driver of each stand by his guns and refuse to back out for the other. Sometimes from mere opprobrious language the dispute passes over into actual conflict. Sometimes the policeman descends like Zeus and stops the battle.

In the present case unhappily there was no *deus ex*

machinâ. I know what you are saying to yourself, madam or miss. You are thinking, only in more courtly phraseology than I can command, that it would have served the two ladies right to have taken the one in one hand, and the other in the other, and to have knocked their heads together. You are right, ladies, as you always are. But there was, unfortunately, nobody to thus satisfactorily settle the matter. Even Thackeray's great Lord Steyne found it best to leave the ladies of his household to settle their difficulties among themselves.

For a week at least things drifted on in this way. The picture came to a standstill. The daily visits to Arques were discontinued. Marcia and the Fräulein spoke to each other as little as possible. The Fräulein would sit indoors over her knitting, or would take it out with her to the Casino grounds. Marcia would arm herself with a book and also make her way to the Casino, where she would sit at a distance from the Fräulein.

It is needless to say that she and Lord Henry constantly met. That excellent nobleman had not been so smitten during the last dozen years of his valuable and useful life.

Marcia, her sound common sense and usual perspicuity notwithstanding, seemed a perfect child in his hands. The fact is, Lord Henry had completely bewitched her, and for the first time in her life she was really in love. And when a woman of Marcia's temperament really loves a man, it becomes a very serious business indeed.

Lord Henry was absent for three days. He told Marcia that important business with the family lawyer necessitated his presence in Town. Where he had gone and what he was actually doing, may perhaps best be gathered by reproducing a scene that was being enacted at St. Austell Towers, and which will moreover throw a little light on the *ménage* Forrester.

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Drawing-room at St. Austell Towers. Five o'clock tea going on. *Dramatis Personæ*—Lady St. Austell, the Duchess of Lincoln, Lady Lindsay, and Lady Henry Forrester.

The Duchess. When do you expect the happy couple, Lady St. Austell? Ought they not to be here by this time?

Lady St. Austell. I believe they *are* due, but our local line is so erratic that I never expect people for an hour after their stated time.

Lady Lindsay. Is the bride pretty?

Lady St. Austell. She had £8000 a year. *C'est tout dire.*

The Duchess. Yes, beauty would have been superfluous. How long have they been married?"

Lady St. Austell. About a month, I think. I know it is their first appearance in public, if one can call one's friends the public.

The Duchess. It was a good match for Lord Cheltenham; he was up to his eyes in debt.

Lady St. Austell. Well, she got his title, and made her own conditions, and they were pretty hard ones.

The Duchess. Really? I never heard.

Lady St. Austell. Oh, yes; he had to swear he would never gamble again, sell his racehorses, break with a creature in South Belgravia, and give up Mrs. Montagu Foster.

Lady Lindsay. How monstrous of a girl to know of such things! Who could have told her?

Lady St. Austell. The disappointed men, I suppose, who wanted to marry her.

Lady Lindsay. Is it possible a man could be so dishonourable?

Lady Henry Forrester. Ha! ha! men indeed! Lady Lindsay, you surely do not believe in men's honour. It went out long ago with duelling.

Lady Lindsay. I know some honourable men.

Lady Henry Forrester. Do you? I don't.

Lady Lindsay (*sharply*). Then I wonder you are so fond of their society.

Lady Henry Forrester. They amuse me.

Lady St. Austell (*aside to the Duchess*). And pay her bets.

The Duchess. But she always wins. (*Aside to Lady St. Austell.*) How can you have such a woman in the house?

Lady St. Austell. She amuses St. Austell, and keeps people going. You know she had an *affaire* with Cheltenham; hence her bitterness.

The Duchess. Of course, every one knows that.

Lady St. Austell (*aloud*). I hear a carriage. I suppose they have arrived. Yes; here they are.

(*Enter* LORD *and* LADY CHELTENHAM.)

Introduction. Effusive hand-shaking. Lady Cheltenham undergoes a volley of ill-bred stares which she bears with the utmost composure.

Lady St. Austell (*handing Lady Cheltenham a cup of tea*). I suppose it is useless to offer you this non-intoxicating beverage, Lord Cheltenham?

Lord Cheltenham (*laughing*). On the contrary, I love it. Pray don't imply that I drink.

Lady St. Austell (*handing him a cup*). No! I only thought you might prefer something else. (*To Lady Cheltenham*). And what sort of a journey have you had?

Lady Cheltenham. Detestable—very rainy, and a horridly slow train.

Lord Cheltenham. Fancy a wife, who has only been married a month, calling any journey with her husband detestable!

Lady Cheltenham. It was not your fault, but I have

got so sick of travelling. We seem to have lived in railway-carriages for the last month.

Lady St. Austell. You have been to Aix?

Lady Cheltenham. We have been all over the continent, and I never wish to see the interior of a church again.

Lord Cheltenham. What an impious remark!

Lady Lindsay (*to the Duchess, sotto voce*). I dare say she wishes she had never seen one with him! She appears to have a temper.

The Duchess. So has he; he won't stand much of that sort of thing.

Lady Henry Forrester (*in a soft tone to Lord Cheltenham, who has sat down on a small ottoman beside her*). My congratulations come very late, but you must nevertheless accept them. I was at Luchon when I heard of your marriage.

Lord Cheltenham (*smiling*). You are very kind.

Lady Henry Forrester (*to Lord Cheltenham*). She is very handsome. (*Lord Cheltenham shrugs his shoulders.*) But she is, as you will soon find out when other men make love to her.

Lord Cheltenham. I don't think they *will*. Lady Cheltenham has principles, and has not been spoilt by the world: she is only twenty.

Lady Henry Forrester. Really? I must still further congratulate you then.

Lord Cheltenham. It is perfectly true; she very much dislikes flirting married women.

Lady Henry Forrester. And had £200,000! Where did you *dénicher* a treasure combining so many excellent qualities?

Lord Cheltenham. I met her at Woolston.

Lady Henry Forrester (*hesitatingly*). And has she made you share her opinion about flirting married women?

Lord Cheltenham. I never cared but for one married woman.

Lady Henry Forrester. One at a time, I suppose, you mean.

Lord Cheltenham. You know perfectly well what I mean.

Lady Henry Forrester (*laughing and rising*). The conversation is getting personal. I will go and change my dress.

The Duchess (*to Lady Lindsay*). How indecent of that woman to carry him off before he has been in the room five minutes!

Lady Lindsay. My dear Duchess, Frenchwomen are all alike; they cannot exist without admiration and excitement. She will make that poor young thing perfectly miserable.

The Duchess. Lord Cheltenham will scarcely be fool enough to prefer her painted face to the bright English beauty of his wife—for she really is good-looking.

Lady Cheltenham (*to Lady St. Austell*). Have you many people in the house, Lady St. Austell?

Lady St. Austell. You have seen all our party with the exception of the men.

Lady Cheltenham. Who is that French lady? I did not catch her name.

Lady St. Austell. She is Lady Henry Forrester—an amusing little woman.

Lady Lindsay. I never heard her say anything amusing.

The Duchess. She keeps it for her admirers, who, I am bound to say, appear fully to appreciate it.

Lady Cheltenham. But her husband?

Lady St. Austell. Oh, I fancy that Lord Henry and she understand one another. Anyhow, he never seems to turn up. She is of excellent family. She was a Beauregard, you know.

Lady Lindsay. She is very unpopular.

Lord Cheltenham. With women.

Lady St. Austell. I like her. I think she is harmless; silly, perhaps; but my husband is devoted to her.

Lady Lindsay. I believe most people's husbands are; she has a *culte* for them.

Lady St. Austell. Lady Lindsay, you are positively uncharitable. The dressing-bell has gone some time; we must really go and adorn ourselves.

(*Enter servant with card which he hands to* LADY ST. AUSTELL.)

Lady St. Austell (*reading card*). Lord Henry Forrester! Well, this is talking of the devil and seeing his hoofs with a vengeance!

Lady Lindsay. You don't mean to say that Lord Henry has turned up? (*Aside to the Duchess.*) A fortunate thing for Lady Cheltenham.

Lady St. Austell (*to servant*). Show this gentleman into the study, and let Lady Henry be told that some one wishes to see her.

FRAGMENTS OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE FORRESTERS.

Lord Henry. Ah, tu ne veux pas m'envoyer une misère de 50,000 francs. Eh bien, nous allons voir!

Lady Henry. Je n'ai que dix mille francs au monde, mais prends-les et de grâce va-t'en. Je t'enverrai davantage demain.

Lord Henry. Tu le jures?

Lady Henry. Lord Cheltenham est ici—cela te suffit-il?

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM BEFORE DINNER.

Lady Lindsay (*to Lady Henry*). And so at last we are to have the pleasure of seeing Lord Henry?

Lady Henry Forrester. I am afraid not. He only came on most important business.

Lady St. Austell. But he has not gone, surely.

Lady Henry Forrester. Alas! He begged me to make every excuse possible, but he was obliged to catch the night train to London. You know diplomats are not their own masters. He starts for St. Petersburg to-morrow.

Lord Cheltenham (*aside*). A little journey that will cost me a thousand or two, I'll be bound.

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Lord Cheltenham seated writing letters in morning-room at St. Austell Towers.

Lady Cheltenham (*entering*). Lord St. Austell was asking for you. Have you not finished your letters yet?

Lord Cheltenham (*impatient, and hastily covering over a note he is writing*). I am nearly ready. I was going out with St. Austell, but if he is in a hurry, he can start without me.

Lady Cheltenham. Your correspondence seems very important this morning (*catching sight of cheque-book on table*). Who have you been writing cheques for?

Lord Cheltenham. My dear Amy, curiosity is not only the sin that lost the whole world, but it is an extremely vulgar vice. What can it interest you to know which of my tradesmen I have been paying?

Lady Cheltenham. It does not interest me in the slightest. Shall I put your letters in the bag?

Lord Cheltenham. Yes, you can take these (*gives her a packet, and carefully places one in his breast-pocket*).

Lady Cheltenham. Is not that one to go?

Lord Cheltenham. No, it's of no consequence—it's not quite finished—and now I must be off. Are you going to remain here?

Lady Cheltenham. Yes, I have some letters to write. I suppose I must let people know where I am.

Lord Cheltenham. Good-bye then.

(*Exit* LORD CHELTENHAM.)

Lady Cheltenham (*soliloquising*). I must break off this entanglement he has with that horrid little Frenchwoman at once. And yet how is it to be done? I cannot make a scene, but I will not put up with her insolence and airs of condescension to me. She was perfectly odious last night with her airs of proprietorship and mock humility. I wonder if that note that he has so carefully hidden from me is intended for her. It would be very wrong to hold up the blotting-paper to the looking-glass, I suppose; what my husband would call a vulgar vice (*holds blotting-paper hesitatingly in her hand*). It is early day to begin suspicion and jealousy, but if he is carrying on an intrigue with that woman I am determined she shall be exposed (*holds the paper up to the looking-glass and reads fragments*). "Dear Berthe—sorry for your trouble—enclose—you ask for—no repetition—" Berthe! that must be that vile woman, and yet what can she have asked him for? Surely not money? (*Turns the paper about and reads* "£1000.") A thousand pounds! How disgraceful! How infamous!—he gives a woman a thousand pounds who is staying in the very house with his wife (*suppresses tears*). No, I will not cry. I will tell her I know all, and insist on her leaving the house at once. (*Rings the bell. To servant.*) Please let Lady Henry Forrester know that I wish particularly to see her here for a few minutes.

Enter LADY HENRY FORRESTER.

Lady Henry Forrester. Ah! dear Lady Cheltenham—how cold these country-houses are with their long, dreary passages—did you wish to speak to me?

Lady Cheltenham. I will be plain with you, Lady Henry. I have discovered, I need not tell you how, that you have renewed the—intrigue you had with my husband before my marriage.

Lady Henry Forrester (*insolently*). *Après.*

Lady Cheltenham. He gave you a cheque for £1000 this morning, and I sent for you to tell you that you either leave this house to-day, or I expose your conduct to Lady St. Austell.

Lady Henry Forrester. Mon Dieu! what a storm in a tea-cup! Intrigue! Exposure! Expulsion! Disgrace! What delicious heroics! My dear Lady Cheltenham, you were not intended for the present generation. You ought to have lived in the days of the Arcadian shepherdesses, you are so delightfully simple. My intrigue, as you call it, with your husband, consists of some valuable State secrets which my husband procured, Heavens knows how —for I don't understand these things—and which he brought down, just having paid for them the sum in question on behalf of your husband, who was most anxious to obtain the information.

Lady Cheltenham. A most plausible explanation, I must admit, Lady Henry. But unfortunately I happen to have read the note which accompanied the cheque; and though I will not discuss with you the services you have rendered my husband, as you have been fully paid for them, I am sure you will see the wisdom of leaving this house.

Lady Henry Forrester (*wincing*). You are very cruel, Lady Cheltenham. I could explain everything—(*recovering herself*). However, having paid a high price for your husband you are perhaps right to be *exigeante*.

Lady Cheltenham. I am not *exigeante*, but I am disappointed, as I thought I had paid *all* his debts when I married him.

(*Enter* LADY ST. AUSTELL *and the* DUCHESS *of* LINCOLN.)

Lady St. Austell. My dear Lady Cheltenham, I have been looking for you everywhere. What have you two been talking about? The inevitable toilette, I suppose.

Lady Cheltenham (*looking Lady Henry full in the*

face). Lady Henry has been making me her adieux, and I believe was just going to seek for you. She has had bad news. Her husband, you know, is going abroad, and she does not like to leave him alone.

The Duchess (*aside*). She certainly never leaves other people's husbands alone. What can have happened?

Lady St. Austell. I am most distressed. Is it imperative that you should go?

Lady Henry Forrester. I am afraid it is (*smiling*). You know—La femme doit suivre son mari.

The Duchess (*aside*). Yes, but you generally follow some one else's, which I expect is your present little game.

Lady Henry Forrester. You must make all my excuses to *ces messieurs*. I am afraid they will not return before I leave. (*To Lady Cheltenham.*) My best compliments to your husband. I dare say his *diplomatic* business will soon call him to town, and then I may have the pleasure of seeing him. Dear Lady St. Austell, you must soon come up to my little *bicoque* in Park Street and do a week's plays. Duchess, it is only *au revoir;* I shall meet you in Paris in October. (*Sotto voce to Lady Cheltenham.*) Quant à toi, vipère, je te repincerai plus tard.

(*Exit* LADY HENRY.)

Lady St. Austell and the Duchess (*together to Lady Cheltenham*). You have gained a glorious victory. What does it all mean?

Lady Cheltenham. It means simply that Lady Henry has got the *nostalgie du foyer*, and is returning to her disconsolate husband.

The Duchess. But they are never together by any chance.

Lady Cheltenham. Well, I would rather not discuss her—she really interests me so very little.

BEFORE DINNER, IN LORD AND LADY CHELTENHAM'S DRESSING-ROOM.

Lord Cheltenham (*angrily*). And you dared to turn her out of the house! You showed a lamentable want of taste. However, the degradation was for you, who placed yourself in a most humiliating position.

Lady Cheltenham. I was *placed*, you mean.

Lord Cheltenham. You have no self-respect. How did you get hold of my note?

Lady Cheltenham (*laughing*). That will only be revealed with other important secrets on the judgment-day!

Lord Cheltenham. You must learn once for all that I will not be interfered with.

Lady Cheltenham. Then you must carry on your *liaisons* with greater caution in future. I decline to be outraged by the presence of a woman like Lady Henry Forrester in any house in which I am staying. (*Descends to drawing-room smiling.*)

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The Fräulein hated the whole affair. She had thoroughly distrusted Lord Henry from the first, and was all the more incensed against him for being the cause of her difference with Marcia, and the gulf that seemed daily widening between them.

The landlady of the house at which they lodged noticed the estrangement, and spoke of it with much gesticulation and even tears in her eyes to her husband François. François, being in his way a philosopher, replied that no woman ever knew her own mind.

"*Souvent femme varie,*
Bien fou qui s'y fie!"

Madame told her husband that he was a pig of a brute. The good man chuckled, lit his cigarette, and went down

to his favourite *cabaret*, where he sat down to console himself with a glass of vin ordinaire and water.

Now it so happened that there sat down by him an Englishman, evidently to the experienced eye a gentleman's gentleman, who produced a meerschaum pipe, cursed French tobacco, and mixed himself some cognac and seltzer.

He was very pleasant, was this same Englishman, and not at all reserved or awkward, like most of his compatriots. In fact, before long he and François were on the best of terms, and François had told him all the little news of Dieppe, including that of his own household, in which he felt sure his new acquaintance would take an absorbing interest, the whole thing being so very droll.

The stranger was a capital listener. François, who was hardly allowed to open his mouth at home, rather prided himself upon his conversational faculties; and very probably the two might have gone on talking until now, had not the Englishman suddenly discovered that he had stopped too long already in such good company, and that he would be in all probability soundly rated by his governor. So he paid the reckoning as a hospitable man should, and strolled away, gently whistling to himself a once popular air, the words of which refer to the hopeless passion of a broken-hearted milkman, resident in the neighbourhood of Paddington Green, which he somehow seemed to find consonant with his own meditations.

When he reached the Hôtel Royal he walked straight through the small courtyard, and making his way to Lord Henry, who was standing under the verandah, respectfully touched his hat. There was no one as it happened within earshot.

"Well, Peters?"

"I've seen the husband, my lord, and he's told me as

possible assisted her, so skilfully and effectively, that Marcia herself, as she looked at her own reflection in the tall cheval glass, could hardly believe that she had but just arrived from a hurried journey.

A single blossom of white stephanotis in her hair, and a spray of the same flower at the side of her circular Scotch brooch, completed the toilet.

Women do not dress to please other women. They dress to annoy other women—to exasperate them if you will—and to please men. Marcia, as I have said long ago, had an almost faultless taste in dress, and on this occasion she was fully satisfied with her own appearance.

Lastly, the maid handed her a box of gloves, from which Marcia selected the pair that best harmonised with her dress. So she passed through a corridor which the maid pointed out, and found herself in a large *salon* brilliantly lighted and exquisitely decorated with flowers.

In one corner of the room was a grand piano, and by it a low case filled with music. Here and there in niches or on pedestals were statues of Parian. Her feet sank into the carpet. The fireplace was filled with strange and beautiful ferns. The open windows looked out on to a balcony fitted with cushions, carpeted and furnished, the whole covered in with a great Venetian tent of red and white, through the drawn curtain of which could be seen the broad Boulevard des Capucines full of motion and life.

Marcia turned to Lord Henry, held out both her hands to him, and said, "It is beautiful. Thank you, Henry, for all your thoughtfulness."

"You light a dull old place up, my sweetheart," he answered, "like a diamond in the depths of a mine." And he put his arms round her, gently pressed her head down on his broad chest, and gave her a long deep kiss between her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEFORE she sat down to dinner, Marcia pencilled a telegram to the Fräulein. It was brief but to the purpose. "Here for short time. Will write fully to-morrow. All well."

Exactly ten words! And with these ten words Marcia purged her conscience so far as the Fräulein was concerned. Indeed, what an essay might be written on the uses and abuses of the telegram. Its uses are obvious, but it is also a grand mechanism for excuse and delay. Telegraph to a man—"Yours received. Will write you fully to-morrow," and you gain a clear day; and, which is more to the purpose, if this telegram is afterwards produced in a court of justice, any judge will tell any jury, and any jury will believe, that you have done all that was possible under the circumstances. The telegram is a solid fact which, so to say, sticks in the gizzard, or in other words, must be digested away by some process of explanation.

I do not wish to defend Marcia, and I am afraid she knew in her own heart that the simple Fräulein would believe a telegram, when a letter would have had no more effect on her than a *bandilla* on a rhinoceros.

The telegram despatched and dinner over, there was a new surprise. For there was waiting in the court-yard of the hotel, not your mere *fiacre*, but a large comfortable victoria, with a pile of rugs and furs on the front seat. Mr. Peters was ready to open the door, and afterwards to seat himself undemonstratively by the coachman's side. And then Lord Henry and Marcia drove

together through the brightest and most beautiful parts of Paris, always beautiful by day, and exquisitely beautiful in its own manner and after its own fashion by night, when the Boulevards are a blaze of light, and the place wears its deceitful appearance of perpetual youth and perpetual Carnival.

It is strange—and I leave the solution of the problem to others—that Paris, the scene of most, if not of all the great crimes of European history, should bear on her forehead no evidence of her guilt, but should remain bright and beautiful, like the largest and crowning gem in some priceless diadem. Her history is written in blood. Who would dream as much in wandering through the streets? We have forgotten the Bastille and the Great Revolution, and we now laugh with Holmes as he gravely tells us that good Americans when they die go to Paris.

The clock on the mantelpiece in the *salon* struck half-past eleven before they bade each other good-night. Lord Henry throughout the day had been at his best, and to do him justice his best was extremely good. He had, without assuming it, all the *tenue de la vieille cour*. Marcia, on the other hand, was overjoyed and wearied with delight.

There is a phrase in the "Prometheus Vinctus" which has defied translators. Put into plain English it is, "The countless laugh of the sea waves." The sun is bright above. The sea, ignorant of its own currents and tides, is tossing itself to and fro, now breaking into flecks of white foam, now melting away into deep, silent purple. Prometheus, looking on it from his rock, speaks of it as living, eternal, and utterly happy.

Over Marcia's mind rippled this same radiance of existence, a radiance in which life is bounded by infinite happiness, and happiness is the pulse and spirit of life.

"To-morrow," said Lord Henry as he kissed her for

the last time, and she laughed happily and said, "Yes, to-morrow."

Then Lord Henry lit a cigar and strolled leisurely round to the Jockey Club. "Messieurs," he murmured to himself "le jeu est fait. Rien ne va plus." The reflection was admirably appropriate, and like most appropriate reflections from elderly lips, unfortunately incorrect.

He was soon persuaded, against his better judgment as he thought, to take part in the baccarat that was going on when he entered the Club. "Lucky in love, unlucky in play," he thought to himself. "What a fool I am to tempt fortune!" Still the old Adam was too strong, and he found himself at the card-table, and before long bidding for a bank. Lord Henry won steadily and largely, so that the time-honoured adage seemed wrong for once in a way. The fickle goddess continued to smile on him, and he returned to the Grand Hotel richer by some fifteen hundred louis.

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Next morning they met in the *salon*. In that huge room all was silent luxury. Through the windows you could see the ceaseless life of the busiest and most hard-working city in the world. Paris is doomed by fate to be the scene of revolution, for the simple reason that she is the pulse of the world. In no other city is the infinite contrast between the rich and the poor more strongly accentuated. London is a "city of cities"—it is not one city, but a dozen. You are in Belgravia, and all around you is wealth and luxury. It is an hour almost before you reach the largest seaport and the largest mercantile centre in the world. How many Londoners have ever visited the Docks, or caught a glimpse of the interior of the Stock Exchange? And eastward, again, lies the huge area of wharves, and quays, and warehouses, in the centre

of which all that Paris has of business would be but a speck on a map.

Life in Paris is concentrated. No city but Paris could have produced Victor Hugo, or even Eugène Sue.

Marcia was standing at the open window as Lord Henry came in. His footsteps roused her, and she turned to greet him. "What is to be done to-day?" he asked lightly. "There are a dozen things. Shall we go to Versailles?—or shall we go shopping? Suppose we stroll down the Boulevards, and please ourselves with looking at things and choosing them, like children in the country, who gather huge bundles of flowers for the simple sake of carrying them home."

Marcia did not quite understand this, and truth to tell, was bewildered for a moment. Even when she recovered herself, she failed to realise the situation. Certainly it did not occur to her that—it might be through her own folly—she was hopelessly in the man's power. A frail mind is unequal to the idea of treachery.

"Surely," she said, "we must go to the Consulate, or was it not the Embassy, you said?—the proper place, wherever it is. We must not lose the day, Henry, or any part of it. We had better start at once."

Lord Henry thrust his hands into his pockets, and took up his stand on the hearthrug. His features hardened, but there was no perceptible change in his voice, which was pleasant and musical as ever.

"My darling," he said, "is it not time we ceased playing with each other? We are too sensible, I hope, for that. Here we are, and here we stop till it pleases you to go elsewhere. I for myself have no particular wish to return to England. In fact, I should only go there to find worry and trouble, that is better managed from a distance. We will go where you please, and for the matter of that when you please. Meantime, surely we had better stop here, unless you would like some

change of scene. As yet you have hardly had so much as a glimpse of Paris. Let us finish our Paris. Then there will be Vienna if you like, and Constantinople; or we can stop halfway at Naples or Sicily. The choice rests with you, and the full liberty a lady always claims, of changing her mind at any moment."

"I am delighted to stay in Paris, Henry. I like it immensely, or at least what little I have seen of it, and I am in no hurry to go. I want to explore it thoroughly, even the old part. The new Paris, where we are, is like a thing of to-day, bright and beautiful, but with something unreal about it. There are parts of London, Henry, which you probably have never seen. They are forgotten parts. But to me they have always been full of life. It would take some days for us to explore old Paris together. Let us get off to the Embassy at once, and then we will stop here, if you do not mind, a week or a fortnight; and if you will give me the mornings to waste upon my love of quaint old things and old places, you shall have the rest of the day entirely your own."

Lord Henry walked to the window and looked out as if expecting to see something. Apparently he saw nothing, for he left the window, turned to the table, slung himself on to it, and then sat erect enough, but with a certain trace of uneasiness, such as that to be seen on the face of a skipper, who, knowing that he ought by a given time to sight a light, and not sighting it, wonders if his compass has gone wrong with the fog, or if there has been some miscalculation in his reckonings.

"You see, Marcia," he said slowly, "this is a very awkward business—a very awkward business for both of us. We are fond of one another, or, to use the established phrase, we love one another. I have no doubt in my own mind, and I am sure you can have none in yours. Now we are together, let us remain together for better or for worse. I am tired of England, and, if it were not for

you, of life. My past has been so wretched and miserable, that I cannot dwell on it, or bear to think of it. But the future is our own. I swear most solemnly that I have never loved any woman but yourself. Until I met you my life had been a curse to me. If there was anything good in me, it was soured and turned to evil. Marcia, if you really love me, if you wish to bring me back to my old self, and to make another man of me and a better, you have only to ask your own heart. I cannot marry you; my wife is still alive. But I can and will give up everything, do anything, with your better influence to aid me."

Marcia turned round on him, her cheeks flushed, her hands clenched, her features set, and her eyes fixed on him with a straight piercing look, under which he felt, it might be for the first time in his life, that he was not altogether master of the position.

"You villain!" she gasped.

"You don't understand me."

"I understand you at last!" she said. "I am not a child, and you have made yourself clear enough. Nothing that I can now say would be likely to touch you. But I can tell you, and I do, that I despise you."

In an instant the door had closed, and she was gone.

There are strangely mixed elements in man, a remark far too true to be original. The best of men have their bad points. The worst of us have hidden somewhere or other some streak of good.

Lord Henry had one or two redeeming qualities. Or, rather, they would have been redeeming if chance had given them an opportunity. It may roughly be said in his favour that he had been unlucky in life. He was personally brave. No man had ever doubted his courage. Nor was he self-indulgent. In absolute command of money—from whatever source obtained—he gratified his

own pleasure, and tastes, but he could have faced any amount of hardship and privation with a free heart and a free forehead.

There was much in him indeed of Ulysses of old. He had seen the cities of many men and learned their ways, and he was still capable of generosity and even self-denial. He had honestly intended to begin life over again. His wife, so far as he was concerned, was dead. It was six years since they had met on friendly terms. During those six years he had lived a roving and discontented life. And he had at last determined to shake off the past, if the thing could be done. Nor must it be forgotten that to him the scruples which determined Marcia had no existence. To him her position seemed pedantic, her rules of life texts for copy-books. And so, from his own point of view, he utterly failed to see how he had in any way to reproach himself.

That Marcia's father, if he had been alive, or her brother, if she had one, would have had a right to call him out was a proposition he would not have disputed for a moment, and he would have gone out cheerfully and without hesitation. But for his own part in the matter he saw nothing that called for reparation or even regret. Indeed, no harm had been done after all. No scandal had been created. The reputation of Miss Conyers was as intact as ever, and entirely in her own keeping.

And said he to himself, confirming the vow with a very forcible oath, "If ever she wants a friend she shall have it without the asking, and I don't let her out of sight, if I can help it. I like a woman who knows her own mind. I can see plainly that the game is up. She has had the best of it, and I shall not pursue it further. Uncommonly few women would have had her nerve."

Then he laughed, and poured out a glass of wine.

"Your health, Marcia Conyers. A good husband for

you, though he'll have a rough time of it. And a happy life, and grandchildren round you, whom I shall never see." And he drained the glass, and dashed it to the floor and stamped it under his heel.

"I wish I could begin life over again," he said. "But it's too late. *Si la jeunesse savait; si la vieillesse pouvait.*" And with this philosophic summary he turned round and rang the bell.

The waiter might have been standing on the mat, he answered with such promptitude. But hotel-waiters have a wisdom of their own. They always know when things are wrong."

"Bring breakfast at once," he said, "and have a *coupé* ready in half an hour."

The waiter departed, and then Lord Henry opened the door and turned into the next room—a small ante-chamber which was part of the suite. It was empty. On its opposite side was the door of Marcia's own room. He strode across to it and knocked, but there was no answer. He knocked again. Then he turned the handle and the door opened.

Marcia was nowhere to be seen. In disorder all about the chamber lay the things they had bought together, each of them with some memory of its own for him. Here was a shawl of light wool and a fan; there a box of gloves. Here again a small watch he had given her, and a bracelet and a ring. There were other such things scattered everywhere, but one more particularly took his attention. It was a silver case—apparently a *bonhonnière* set with jewels—which they had purchased together, and the memories of which were still fresh in his mind. When you touched the little knob that opened the lid a tiny humming-bird started up as the lid flew back, fluttered its wings, swelled its throat, and broke into a burst of song. Then with a snap the bird would drop down and the lid close upon it.

He touched the spring, and the lid flew open. The bird darted up, shook its wings, and swelled its throat. Then there came a slight click, as of something wrong in the mechanism. The lid shut with a snap, and the little jewelled bird was hopelessly crushed between its rim and the rim of the box. He took the toy from the table, dropped it upon the floor, and crushed it under his heel.

Lord Henry went back to the *salon*, and again summoned the waiter.

Madame had gone out. In fact madame had been gone now some little time. Alphonse had thought that milord was aware. Alphonse was in despair, for the breakfast was ready. No doubt madame would return immediately. Beyond this Alphonse knew nothing.

Lord Henry could now see the cards upon the table with their faces up. No man could act more quickly on the spur of the moment. Evidently the only thing now to be done was to go. So he sent for Mr. Peters, who made his appearance without a shade of expression upon his prosaic and eminently respectable features.

"I shall leave at once, Peters. You look to the bill, and see that everything is ready. Do not lose a moment. I wish to be in Vienna as soon as possible. Look to everything, and meet me at the station. We shall start by the *Rapide*. I am now going to the Club."

Mr. Peters bowed and departed, but there was a curious expression on his face as he closed the door behind him.

"Bested at last, are you?" said Mr. Peters to himself below his breath. "Bested at last, eh? And serve you right, too. You're a bad 'un, you are," he added in a highly moral tone. "And I'm sick of you, and of all your carryings on. I only wish there'd been some young fellow in the business to give you a jolly good hiding. You want Johnny up the orchard. That's what you want,

you old rip. And J. Peters would be the last man in the world to interfere and spoil sport on such an occasion.''

With which appropriate ethical summary of the position, Mr. Peters composed his features, and expeditiously carried out his master's orders.

CHAPTER XXIV

When Marcia Conyers found herself on the Boulevards she had actually developed no fixed plan of procedure. All she wanted was to be free from the pestilential atmosphere she had just quitted. Her pride revolted at the indignity to which she had just been subjected, and her mind experienced that revulsion of feeling that is only known to those who have passed through a similar ordeal.

To say that at this moment she hated Lord Henry is to put matters very mildly. Her great love for him had died in a single instant, and its place was filled by a sense of positive loathing.

She quickly made up her mind that the only possible course for her to adopt was to return immediately to Dieppe and the Fräulein, and with that view she hailed the first passing *fiacre*, and told the coachman to drive to the Gare St. Lazare. It was an hour before the next train left for Dieppe, so Marcia having sent Miss Dietz a brief telegram announcing her arrival, had ample time for reflection.

She wisely determined to tell her old friend the entire truth, and she plainly saw that nothing else could be done. That Miss Dietz would believe her she did not for one moment doubt. And she knew the old lady too well to have any fears with reference to the welcome that kindly soul would offer her.

Furious as Marcia was with the man who had treated her so infamously, she was still more incensed with herself. "It is inconceivable," she thought, "that I could have been such an idiot! I shall never forgive myself.

Who would believe in my innocence that heard the story of the last twenty-four hours? Happily it is improbable that any one will ever hear it, for that man, ruffian as he has been, will at least be silent. But I fear my self-respect has gone for ever. Oh God, that this madness should have fallen on me! And that without the least necessity for it, I should have thus compromised myself! In my case there was no need for any elopement; there was no angry or unwilling father and mother whom to outwit, no disagreeable relations impossible to pacify. I was my own mistress, free to please myself, and with no one to say me nay, and yet in this purposeless manner I wilfully sacrifice myself, and possibly ruin my reputation and good name."

These and kindred thoughts crowded together in the young girl's brain. They were not very pleasant, but at the same time they did no great harm. Indeed it was better for Marcia that she should thoroughly realise the situation.

The train left St. Lazare station. A couple of francs to the guard induced that obliging official to keep Marcia a carriage to herself, and before the train was a dozen miles out of Paris exhausted nature had assisted herself, and Miss Conyers was fast asleep.

Sleep is nature's own opiate, which, unlike the opiates of medicine, has no reaction. So long as you can sleep you are safe. And not a few men who have helped to make the world's history have had the gift of sleep at will. When Marcia reached Dieppe she was herself again —able to look back calmly upon what had happened, and in a way to enjoy her own victory.

* * * * *

When the train drew up at the Dieppe station, almost the first person that Marcia saw was the kindly Fräulein. The little woman came up to her, stood on tiptoe, and

put her arms round the girl's neck, and kissed her affectionately on both cheeks.

"My darling, how glad I am to see you! What I have suffered! But there's nothing to be said now. Let us hurry home, and then you shall tell me everything if you like. I shall ask no questions, my sweet one. I don't want to bother you, and I am too delighted to have got you back. I so feared that I had been unkind and unsympathetic, and I thought that you had left me. When I got your telegram last night, its uncertainty frightened me to death; but the one to-day, I believe, made me twenty years younger. I never knew, Marcia, how much I really loved you until I thought that I had lost you."

"You are right, dear Fräulein," answered Marcia; "we will say no more about it until we get home, and then I will indeed tell you everything. I will keep nothing back even if I forfeit your affection by my frankness."

"Nothing will ever make you do that, my child, my own dear child." And the Fräulein lovingly pressed her companion's arm.

When they had got home and were fairly settled down, the story was told pretty much as I have told it myself. It made the Fräulein almost ferocious. She stamped her foot, and paced up and down the room, and looked unutterable things.

"My dear," she said, "it would have been very wrong, but I wish you had slapped his face, or thrown a glass at him and damaged his good looks. A man of that kind ought to be killed. I should like to kill him myself. It makes me mad to think not only of the wickedness of the brute, but of his abominable conceit. So you were to be his plaything, were you, Marcia, for just so long as pleased his fancy? Well!" And if ever that one little monosyllable summed up the entire aspect of a situation it was on the present occasion in the Fräulein's mouth.

And then, now that the whole matter was over, Marcia fairly laughed. Laughing is contagious, and the Fräulein laughed too.

"We've a right to laugh, my dear," she said with judicial profundity. "Those have the laugh who win. And to think that a man well born and fairly well educated should be such a contemptible wretch! *C'est incroyable!* Of one thing, Marcia, we may be quite sure. *He* won't talk of the matter. There is nothing to fear from him."

Then the conversation drifted into other and pleasanter channels. Obviously, now that the trouble was all over, the first thing to be done was to finish the picture, the magnum opus, and the next to get back again to Chelsea.

Nor was this reasonable programme at all difficult to carry out. Marcia the next day was at work in earnest. You can always work the better for a distinct break even if its incidents have not been altogether of the pleasantest. And Marcia set to work with a will.

"It will do now," she said one afternoon as she took down the canvas from her easel; "and I don't think I shall put another touch to it."

"I know nothing of art," profoundly answered the Fräulein, "and am probably the better judge on that account. I don't think you need."

So the picture was carefully packed in its wooden case and protected by multiplicity of wrappings from all dangers of transit, and the very next morning saw the two friends on their way back to London.

"Old Chelsea," said the Fräulein with conviction, "will be quite pleasant again after all this racket and hard work. I positively long for the Embankment and the river and our own fireside. Who was it who said that after all you could spend more days in the open air in London than in any city in the world? He wasn't very far wrong; and when we've had a week of well-

earned rest, Marcia—a delightful week of doing really nothing, unless perhaps we are very wild in the evening and actually go to the theatre together—we will select what I believe you artists call a new 'pitch.' We will give old England a fair trial this time, and next year we can go to my own country, where the Dietzs used to be Barons or something of the sort, and we'll paint some of their old castles. Castles seem to suit you, Marcia. I hope one day that you will have one of your own."

"That is not very probable," Marcia answered. "But they are easier to paint than the sea, for they do not change their moods."

The day after their arrival in London the picture with the prettiest of little notes was duly left for Lord Norwich at the Guards' Club. "You expressed a wish to have this picture," said Marcia. "Pray accept it as an expression of my sincere regard, and as a token of my appreciation of your kindness to me."

And then came business. For Marcia's name was by this time sufficiently well known, and she found herself with a choice of commissions, any one of which had its own recommendations. All these, of course, had to be considered. The one that seemed the best was from his Grace the Duke of Ullswater. His Grace wanted six small pictures of his estate in Westmorland. He would be happy to place a cottage and carriage at Miss Conyers' disposal, or she could occupy a suite of rooms at Ullswater Park. He only suggested the cottage, as she might find the house dull, all the family being away. But in any case she was, of course, to consider herself as entirely free of the whole place, and the servants would expect her, and had had their orders.

"It's delightful, my dear," said the Fräulein. "We'll quarter ourselves on the Duke, and have a real good time of it, and be most virtuously industrious into the bargain. I don't know much of English Dukes, but I

have heard that they are a nice class of people, who, as a rule, mean well. In my country they are not of much account."

This clinched the matter, and his Grace's proposition was forthwith accepted.

It was the beginning of September, so that there was not a day to be lost, and the next morning they were off.

I need not describe the glories of Ullswater Park. They stand on record in county histories and in Murray's Guide-books. Vernon Heath made them familiar to Londoners by a special series of his wonderful photographs. It was an *embarras de richesses.* But Marcia was not long in fixing upon her first scene, a view of the western face of the castle, with the hills and pine-woods running up behind it. And the very next day found her at work.

Neither need I follow the course of the particular picture itself. Painters, like speakers, singers, actors, and, I am sorry to have to add, surgeons, acquire nerve and confidence in the only way they can be acquired—by practice.

Marcia had now sufficient reliance in herself. She knew that she could always trust herself to a certain point, She might ultimately go beyond it. But of maintaining it she was certain. And it is just this attitude of mind that is wanted for the long work of life. Dash and fortune can never secure more than occasional triumphs, however brilliant. Providence, Napoleon used to say, was always on the side of big battalions. Equally Providence is on your side in any work which you know to be thoroughly within your strength.

CHAPTER XXV

THE *Cecilia* had got under weigh without any definite destination, the orders given to the master being to shape his course for Copenhagen. Vague ideas crossed Lord Norwich's mind of perhaps pushing as far north as Hammerfest, and trying his luck with the noble sport still to be found in the sub-arctic zone; and as to the genuine nature of which those who wish to satisfy themselves and to spend a day enjoyably cannot possibly do better than consult the stirring narrative of Mr. Lamont of Knockdow.

This, however, was but a first resolve and an impetuous one, much in the spirit of the naughty schoolboy who runs away to the nearest seaport town with a knife, a ball of string, a candle, matches, and a week's pocket-money.

The sailing-master, as soon as his lordship had recovered his temper, was easily able to convince him that the *Cecilia* was no more fit to encounter even ordinary "pack," to say nothing of floes, than if she were a gilded walnut-shell; and it was evident indeed that his words were those of wisdom.

So I am sorry to say the yacht went no further than the Faroe Islands, and thence bent her course back again, not, as the crew had fondly hoped, to the Solent and their homes, but to the French coast. Here she hovered about from one port to another as the caprice or rather the restlessness of the day might prompt. It was a good time for the crew, who got any amount of shore leave. It was a good time for the officers, who naturally

preferred coasting to a cruise. It was a bad time for Lord Norwich, who, everywhere alike, was restless and discontented.

On board there was nothing for him to do. "We will refit thoroughly this winter," he said to himself, "and start before the Spring equinox. Patagonia or Paradise, Disco or the Devil; it is all pretty much the same to me. But I must get some fellow or a couple of fellows to join me, or I shall drive myself mad."

November came, and the yacht dropped her anchor in the Bay of Naples—perhaps the most beautiful natural harbour in the world after that of San Francisco. Here Lord Norwich went ashore and briskly commenced to telegraph home for friends. Somehow or other the search seemed as difficult as that for guests for a wedding-breakfast. Lord Norwich's friends fell roughly into two classes. The greater number of them were busy and could not possibly come. Those who were not busy were enjoying themselves somewhere else, and in American parlance "fixed up."

"Funny position," he vaguely observed. "I offer a man a comfortable cruise where he pleases, and the men who would like to come can't come, and the men who can come don't care to come." His lordship was quite right. The most enjoyable things in this world often go begging for the same reasons. "However, I am here," he continued, "and I shall remain for the present," and so was rowed ashore.

On shore he found by accident at the first hotel he entered, the very man, or more exactly a man of the very type, he wanted. Captain Markby was an Englishman to the backbone. Nobody exactly knew how he lived or what were his means, but nobody could say a word against him. He had been in a line regiment, and had been put upon compulsory half-pay. He had joined the army in the Soudan when quite a lad, and had since

been in many places, and knew all kinds and conditions of men. His age might have been anything at which you could guess it, from forty to even fifty. He was of middle height, and of an immensely powerful build. He was too heavy to ride well except upon animals far beyond any price he could command. But he could hold his own in any, or almost any, trial of strength or skill in which his weight did not disqualify him.

Among his intimates he was sometimes spoken of as "Old Xavier," and from his supposed readiness to go anywhere and do anything upon the minimum of provocation, "from pitch and toss to manslaughter."

A man, withal, as true as steel, and as straight as a dart, a thorough sportsman, and as brave as a lion. It was as if he had been opportunely dropped from the clouds out of a balloon by some special providence.

In a very few minutes Markby and Lord Norwich were discussing matters quietly over a cigar. It was one of Markby's merits that he never asked questions unless they were absolutely necessary. He never wanted to know whence you had come, or whither you were going, or upon what you were occupied. He held such matters to be your own concern. "I have no secrets of my own," he used to say. "They are troublesome and expensive things. And with no secrets of my own I have no stowage in me for the secrets of other people. I don't want them."

Knowing this peculiarity of his friend, Lord Norwich proceeded to circumvent him *secundum artem*.

"There is nothing doing here, Xavier, I suppose."

"Nothing whatever. That is exactly why I am here."

"And that is exactly why I do not mean to stop here. Xavier, old chap, I have had a bit of a facer. It has not been in money matters, and I am sure I need not tell you that there is nothing about it which I need keep back. But it has been a facer all the same, and I want

to keep on the move. There is nothing like motion to shake dust and cobwebs out of you. There is nothing like friction to burnish you up. But I want company. I'm hipped and dull. The *Cecilia* is here and can start in an hour, or if you prefer it, in a week. You join me, and we'll go where you please, and for as long as you please. I am quite indifferent. The only thing I know is, that if you will come, like a good fellow as you are, and keep me company, I can make you tolerably comfortable. And I will promise you not to badger you with my own affairs, and here's my hand on the promise."

Markby thrust his own hands into his pockets and looked at the ground. Finding nothing there, he looked up at the sky. Apparently he found nothing there either, for he swept the horizon from his right to his left, and then slowly back again from left to right, without a remark.

After a few seconds he said: "Perhaps I may as well come. You need no one to keep you out of mischief, Norwich; but you may perhaps as well be kept from yourself. People talk of men being ruined by bad company. It's nonsense. The worst company a man can have (I don't care who he is) is himself. When he is tired of himself, look out for breakers ahead. I'm your man, and I can come at once."

They shook hands and struck the bargain without another word.

Markby's arrangements were soon completed. His travelling effects were almost as simple and as few as those of an Arab sheik. His weapons—a couple of guns, a brace of revolvers, a rifle, and a hunting-knife, were always in order. His business matters needed no settlement. Every necessary paper and document was contained in a broad belt which lay at that very moment under his waistcoat.

So before the sun set that evening the engines of the *Cecilia* were throbbing, her anchors were heaved and

bowsed, the course for the next four-and-twenty hours was shaped on the chart, the word was given, "full steam ahead," and once again the superb little vessel was off on her wanderings.

"You're a trump, Xavier," observed Lord Norwich emphatically.

"Rot!" answered Markby. "But if politeness did not forbid me, I should express a strong suspicion that you were a fool."

"So I believe I am," answered Lord Norwich. And the matter dropped.

They steamed slowly for some hours before they turned in. The sailing-master's orders were to make for Cyprus, where there is still good sport to be had all the year round, and good wine of the country to be got. But they changed their minds, and ended by throwing anchor in the port of the Piræus.

What endless reflection the irony of history affords! The "Republic of Plato," the grandest and greatest work in the whole range of ancient Hellenic literature, commences with the memorable sentence, "I walked down yesterday to the Piræus."

It is said that Plato wrote that same sentence twenty or thirty times over before he could pitch upon words sufficiently few and natural, and arrange them in a sufficiently simple order to satisfy himself with the result. Had he to-day to make his way from Athens to the Piræus, or back again, he would go by a penny tram-car, unless in so luxurious a mood as to charter a fly.

The mountains still look on Marathon, but Marathon has as little to tell us of Greece and her liberties as have Battle or Hastings of the Norman Conquest, or the advertisements of patent medicines and bottled beer upon the Pyramids of the kings by whom those Pyramids were built.

CHAPTER XXVI

MARCIA meantime had been working at her commission with almost mechanical industry. It would have been mechanical, indeed, had it not been servant to the genius of art. It is but seldom that genius and industry are combined. And the man who measures out to himself a given amount of work to be done in each day is in shrewd danger of becoming what the Falstaff of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* terms a "mechanical salt butter rogue." I say the Falstaff of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*—a very different person indeed from the other Falstaff with which he is so often confounded.

The cottage which they chose in preference to a suite of rooms at Ullswater Park was charming. So far as nature went without assistance from man, Wordsworth might have been content with it. Man had added a good deal in the way of solid material comfort. The furniture was modern. The doors and windows were air-tight. The disused pump had been padlocked up, and was replaced by a miniature Artesian well. For my own choice, I am not at all sure that I should not have preferred, as Marcia and the Fräulein did, the cottage to the castle.

If you could have put the building upon wheels, and transferred it with its tiny *entourage* to within the fifteen miles' radius of Charing Cross, dukes themselves would have been found bidding fancy prices for it.

Honeysuckle climbing up the walls; above the honeysuckle the nests of martens. A small conservatory in the little patch of garden, with every novelty in the way of heating apparatus, so that even orchids

flourished. Opposite this tropical house in miniature an old wall with apricot-trees, and under these, fertile beds of strawberries. A little rosary, a little kitchen-garden, a little tank with gold fish and water-plants. Everything was complete down to the model cow-house, with a gem of an Alderney cow, not much bigger than a St. Bernard mastiff, and far more tractable.

"If this is what comes of art," observed Marcia, "I am satisfied for myself that art pursued under average chances is a far preferable career to politics, or medicine, or law, or anything else; and I, for one, shall sturdily decline henceforth to join in any movement for my own emancipation."

"It is not every girl who can paint," answered the Fräulein, "any more than it is every one who can govern, or even fight. Meantime, Marcia, we are well off. You prove yourself as industrious as you always are, and I for my part will promise to give you no trouble. I am getting old, and it is pleasant to have some sort of an idea of the kind of place which is reserved for a used-up German old maid, when she becomes an encumbrance down here."

The pigeons began to cluster round a quaint little tower, which was a tool-shed on its ground-floor, a seed-house above; higher still a clock-tower, and above that again a dove-cot. The bees were crowding into their hives as hurriedly and noisily for their size as soldiers into barracks, or swallows into the osier-beds. The mist was beginning to hang on the surface of the surrounding meadows. It was clearly time for close shutters and drawn curtains. So Marcia and the Fräulein agreed. One half the world, we are told, knows not how the other half live. Certainly one half the world knows not how the other half enjoys itself.

I do not in the present case intend at all to follow in detail the progress of the Ullswater series. Suffice to say

that the work went on cheerily, and that after about three weeks, his Grace came down himself, and was pleased to express himself more than satisfied.

The Duke was a tall, fine old man, who could still ride well to hounds, and who, when young, must have been striking, if not exactly handsome. As an *attaché* he had learnt the art of compliment without flattery, and so contrived to impress Marcia very favourably. He told her that she had opened his eyes to the beauties of his own place. It had come to him as a matter of course by descent, and so having always regarded it as his own *in posse* or *in esse*, he had never felt for it that admiration which Rochefoucauld (was it not?) had declared to be impossible without a certain amount of envy and jealousy. He was ashamed of himself for not coming oftener to Westmorland and stopping there longer. There was no excuse for an absentee landlord whose place had beauties in it such as Miss Conyers had discovered. He must console himself with the reflection that genius could see at a glance that thing to which ordinary eyes were dim or totally blind. And with these any many other stately expressions of his approval, his Grace was pleased to take his departure.

Under all this courtly talk there ran a little golden thread of kindliness, for next morning no less a person than the estates' steward himself rode round with a letter, which he explained he had been instructed to deliver in person, that Miss Conyers might be saved the trouble of a reply. It contained a cheque for a thousand guineas, and was to the effect that his Grace hoped Miss Conyers would consider the cottage to be at her disposal any time, upon notice to his steward of her intentions. The Duke added that he felt really grateful to Mr. Moss, through whose instrumentality he had been enabled to secure what he intended to make an heirloom in his family.

The steward, a stately gentleman, accompanied by his

own pad groom, having delivered this highly satisfactory communication, trotted away in a manner and with a bearing which implied that he did not every day carry letters even for a Duke, but that the present occasion was wholly exceptional.

He also looked critically at the scenery round about him, as if he were being consulted over its merits. In reality, having finished his mission, he was speculating upon some complicated problems of subsoil drainage.

Marcia took the steward's message—whether it was so intended or not—as a hint, and did not, as she could have wished to do, write a letter of thanks. But she continued her work with a will that astonished even Miss Dietz. She completed her task to her own satisfaction, which for her was a thing very far from usual. And then good-bye was bidden to the noble castle and the pleasant little cottage; and Marcia and the Fräulein found themselves in a comfortable reserved carriage, rapidly rolling back to London.

Even in England a long railway journey is comfortable, with a moderate supply of the necessaries of life and a small assortment of magazines and papers.

The little house in Old Chelsea never seemed pleasanter. For a good week they abandoned themselves to a sort of busy idleness, shopping in the morning, and dining at a restaurant, and in the evening the theatre.

Then came the question of what should next be done. It was the beginning of October. London was virtually empty, dull, and haunted with the east wind.

"We must go somewhere or other," said Marcia. "We can very well afford it, and what is more, we deserve it."

"I don't care where we go, my dear," replied the Fräulein. "But I quite agree with you that it would be nice to go somewhere. Besides, our little place here costs nothing while we are away beyond the rent and the taxes."

"We have not yet seen the Mediterranean," continued Marcia. "Let us wait quietly till December, and have a regular tour. If I had a map at hand we could mark it out with the compasses. Really there is an infinitude of choice, and we had better leave ourselves more or less free. Suppose we begin with the Riviera. Then if we like we can try Rome. Nor do I see any reason in the nature of things why we should not even venture on the Levant itself."

"As you please, my dear," said the Fräulein. "All places are alike to me. For they are all new, and if I have you with me I cannot possibly be dull."

"You are a dear old sibyl," laughed Marcia. "I don't believe you are German at all. You are directly descended from the old lady of Cumæ; and perhaps through her from the witch of Endor. Leave things to me. We will start as agreed, and our first resting-place shall be Nice. Venice I don't think I care about. When we are safely at Nice, we will put on the considering-cap, and, as sailors say, whistle for a wind."

The first week of December found them at Nice. The Fräulein had relieved the monotony of the journey by long intervals of sleep and of Mr. Trollope's cathedral novels. Marcia, on the other hand, had been industriously endeavouring to acquire modern Greek, a pursuit in which the knowledge of ancient Greek is, if anything, a hindrance to you. You must "go for" your modern Greek as David went for Goliath. The erudition of Porson and Brunck is only in your way. Nor will any study of Homer or Plato enable you to dispute a cab-fare or order dinner at a restaurant. You might as well venture out in London armed with a semi-colloquial power over genuine Anglo-Saxon.

CHAPTER XXVII

At the Piræus there is nothing to be done or seen. Athens itself has been much over-praised. There are far finer ruins and relics of antiquity in many parts of Italy than are to be found in the whole Hellenic kingdom; and if you read your Wordsworth's "Greece," and go to Greece fired by its artistic enthusiasm, you will find yourself chillingly disappointed.

The modern Greeks, I care not what may be said to the contrary, are a mongrel race, and deserve the reputation they have won in the City of London, and on every continental Bourse.

But Greece itself can have little altered, if at all. The sea, the mountains, the quarries, the forests, are still there, and we can read into them what we please.

Lord Norwich, beyond vague reminiscences from his Eton days, knew nothing of Greek literature, and cared less. Markby could use strong language in most of the European dialects, but could not make head or tail of a tongue in which an equilateral triangle followed by a dash does duty for our national oath.

"We will worry on as best we can," observed the philosopher. "The price of things is pretty much the same all the world over. If we find we are being robbed beyond endurance, we can easily run up the Levant, and throw anchor in the Golden Horn. You would like Stamboul, Norwich, I am sure."

So that evening they went up to the city and dined in the Acropolis. It is curious to drink fresh wine and eat fresh olives in the very place, perhaps in the very spot,

where olives were eaten and wine and water drunk by the statesmen and heroes who drove back the tide of Eastern barbarism, and so laid a foundation for the history of Europe.

Somehow or other it came about that they loitered on without any definite plans. There is plenty of snipe-shooting to be had all round the Greek coast, and men who can bring down a brace of snipe right and left prefer snipe-shooting to any other form of sport, exactly as veterans with the line will tell you, that short of the pleasure of a day with the salmon there is nothing on earth to equal a good day with the Thames gudgeon. In India, next to the tiger, if there be one in the neighbourhood, and the bear, your genuine shikary is perhaps keenest on a day with the snipe.

And the two men were as happy as need be. Markby, philosopher and citizen of the world, had nothing for which to wish. Norwich was livened out of all apathy by Markby's genuine schoolboy geniality. And they were both in this cheery frame of mind when one of those events happened upon which my history hinges.

* * * * *

The Fräulein was looking one morning over her paper in the intervals of breakfast when her eye was caught by the words, "The Earl Norwich has arrived at Athens in his yacht the *Cecilia*." The little old lady said nothing for a time, but presently remarked in a dreary kind of way that she was getting a little tired of Nice, and should almost like to go further south.

"Shall we try Rome?" asked Marcia.

No, the Fräulein did not seem to take kindly to the notion of a visit to the Eternal city.

So first one place was mentioned and then another, and then another, each to be dismissed in its turn, until Marcia grew almost impatient, and was irreverent enough

to suggest in one breath, Mesopotamia, Midlothian, Niagara, Newcastle, and as an alternative either Camberwell or Constantinople.

"You seem to be joking, Marcia," said the Fräulein. "I happen to be in earnest, and have no intention at present of visiting Camberwell. But I should very much like to see Constantinople before I die, and we can take Athens on our way."

Whenever the Fräulein began to talk of her death as being even remotely possible, Marcia's heart began to soften at once.

"All right, Fräulein," she answered, "you shall have your own way, and nobody shall dare to contradict you. Constantinople if you like, and Athens on the way. Come, Miss Dietz, I am almost as tired of Nice as you are, and am almost beginning to like a good journey for its own sake. Besides, I want to air my Greek."

Marcia was in earnest, feeling really disposed for a change. The Fräulein was in earnest for reasons of her own. They were becoming by this time experienced travellers, never wasting time, and consequently never having to hurry themselves. They chose the sea route, and before long found themselves at Athens. The Fräulein had kept her secret to herself, and Marcia never noticed the *Cecilia* at her moorings in the harbour.

As Norwich and Markby had given themselves shore leave, the white ensign was not flying, and the *Cecilia*, except for the beauty of her lines to a trained eye, looked as much like any other yacht as need be.

The two ladies put up at an hotel, the name of which I do not intend to give, but where French was spoken.

English ladies travelling without an escort were naturally at Athens an object of curiosity, and the head-waiter was more than usually condescending and attentive. He

happened also to be possessed of a Maltese wealth of dialects, speaking all tongues more or less indiscriminately, so that Marcia was much impressed by his civility and his obvious desire to make himself useful.

He was a Greek, and his name happened to be Peter Clift. This at least is as nearly as I can spell the name in English. I may add that it was appropriate, as names sometimes are.

Mr. Clift had soon ascertained as much as he required to know about the two English ladies and their business. When his evening's work was over he went round to a wine-shop in the neighbourhood, where he sat for some time over a glass of absinthe, until at last a man came in whom somehow or other he seemed to know.

The stranger, who might have been a peasant or countryman of any sort, took no notice of Mr. Clift, and Mr. Clift took no notice of the stranger. The one paid his shot, lit his cigarette, and walked out. The other laid down his paper, added a cognac to the amount of reckoning, lit a cigar, and also turned into the street. But before Mr. Clift had gone four hundred yards, or indeed half that distance, his shoulder was lightly tapped, and swinging sharply round on his heel, he said, "You, Stephen, my king of hunters. There is game about."

"Indeed," was the answer. "The news is good. These butchers are extortionate thieves. They are as bad as brigands. And game is always in season, whether it be Italian roebuck, French partridge with its pretty red stockings, or English pheasant."

"They are English pheasants," answered Mr. Clift, without the least emotion or excitement in his voice. "A brace of hens, my dear friend. One old and one young, but both in good condition. They have been talking all dinner-time, in their abominable tongue, about the

country, and about how they meant to see it. I almost was tempted to recommend them a guide, but I am afraid, dear one, you are too well known."

Both men chuckled.

"How will you let me know?" asked the stranger.

"The usual way," replied Mr. Clift. "Leave things to me, heart of my own, and now leave me to myself, for these dogs of Syndics make the gas painfully trying to my old eyes."

The other dropped behind at once without a word, and Mr. Clift with an unmoved countenance made his way back to the hotel.

Marcia and the Fräulein sat that night in the drawing-room of the hotel, and discussed their plan for the next day. They soon came to the conclusion that the first thing to be done was to go a little way out into the country. They could have a fly, or they could have ponies. They ended by deciding on ponies, and as Mr. Clift happened to be in attendance mentioned their wish to him.

Mr. Clift would see to everything. He would recommend mules in preference to ponies, if the ladies had no objection. He would also find them a guide, who of course would need a mule of his own. He would be most careful to select a guide who could be trusted, and who knew the country thoroughly. And having got his orders, Mr. Clift set about their execution with a countenance absolutely immovable. The whole thing indeed would have been comical if it had not also had about about it a distinctly ugly and dangerous side.

It is true that your Greek brigand for some years past has not killed his victims, or lopped off their ears or fingers or noses. Practically, perhaps, he is a less dangerous ruffian than the Paris Apache, or the Liverpool corner-man. But there is no romance about him.

He is, to put it plainly, a blackguard of the very lowest type. And it is horrible even to think of a lady being for a day or even an hour under the control and at the mercy of a scoundrel with as little chivalry in him as the worst loafer or plug-ugly man in the foulest New York slum.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WINTER can be as sharp in Athens as in London, but as a rule the Greek winter has many more enjoyable days than in England. On this particular morning the air was bracing, but the sun was shining brightly, and the two ladies started for their day's trip in the best of spirits.

The mules were serviceable beasts, and the guide, who was also mounted, managed to keep them going at a brisk pace. Nothing can be more lovely than mountainous country under a winter sun, and Marcia and the Fräulein were exhilarated almost beyond themselves by the keen air, the exercise, and the glorious view, or, to be more exact, succession of views; for in Greece, as in the Highlands, new beauties disclose themselves at every stage of your journey.

They had gone some five or six miles when Marcia gave the order to halt that she might make a rapid sketch without dismounting. The guide remonstrated volubly in French, or what did duty for French. There were beautiful places a little further on; only a mile further was a place with which the English ladies would be enchanted. It was a waterfall at the side of the road. Painters came from all parts of the world to see it. For the ladies to miss it would be terrible, pitiable, unbelievable; so the sketch-book was shut and the party proceeded.

A little further on two roads meet, and here seated on a stone wall doing nothing was a ragged-looking nondescript lad, who might have been a shepherd boy or might

have been a beggar. He was of no describable nationality, and had with him a dog, as mongrel as himself. Marcia good-naturedly threw him some small coins, which he picked up and acknowledged with his white teeth and with much gesticulation.

The guide apparently had some question to ask him about the state of the road, which took a few minutes. Then they went on, and about a quarter of a mile further saw before them a mountain stream with heather on its banks crossed by a small stone bridge.

Marcia and her friend were about halfway over the bridge, and the guide was just approaching it, when two ill-clad men emerged from under the first arch, which was dry. They might have been goat-herds or peasants or beggars. They were as nondescript as the English tramp, and as generally dirty. Nor was it remarkable that each of them should have a knife in his belt, and each a fowling-piece slung on his shoulder. What was remarkable was that they had apparently been waiting for the travellers, and came straight for them.

Of course Marcia and the Fräulein drew rein. The guide did the same, and the two strangers entered into colloquy with him. It was strictly and literally a colloquy, for all three talked at once and began to gesticulate violently.

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked the Fräulein.

"I don't know," said Marcia. "But it's not pleasant." So they sat and waited, and the colloquy continued.

After about ten minutes of apparent dispute the guide dismounted and came up to Marcia, bearing on his countenance and in his whole manner obvious signs of the most extreme dejection. The men, he explained, insisted that the ladies were trespassing. They also declared that the ladies were spies, and they threatened his life, but had promised to do him no harm if he would go back to Athens and tell the ladies' friends. The ladies need not be afraid.

It was only a matter of a day, perhaps less. Had he not better go back?

What was to be done? It was manifestly impossible to keep the guide against his will. It was equally impossible for Marcia and the Fräulein to make any show of resistance. They tried expostulation with the guide, but it was quite useless. In fact he intimated plainly that he had asked for permission to return out of politeness, but that if it were not given he should save trouble and waste of time by going back without it.

Marcia explained that they had watches with them, and that surely if they left them, or a chain, or a ring, that would be enough. They had done no possible damage, and if they had, the Consul at Athens could put everything right.

The mention of the Consul did not seem to mend matters, for the guide turned round and rejoined the two strangers. Then after exchanging a few polite compliments with them in an undertone he mounted his mule, turned its head round, and deliberately trotted away in the direction of the city.

The men now came up, and each seized a bridle of each mule, the one that led Marcia's beast proceeding some twenty yards in advance, so that it was impossible for a word to be exchanged. Presently a bye-road struck off from the main track. They turned into this, and made their way along it at a slow pace, for it was little better than a sheep-path. It was cold and chilly, the mountains were already hidden in mïst, a thick fog began to rise from the low ground, and it soon became to all intents and purposes dark.

The men, however, must have known their way, for they proceeded without hesitation where the unexperienced eye could not have discerned a track.

At last in the distance a light showed itself twinkling from a window. As they drew nearer a stone hut

was apparent—much such a hut as those you can find scattered on the moors among the English shires. At the door of this shanty the two ladies were signalled to dismount.

Inside, the hut consisted of but one room, boasting no chimney, and only one small window. It was roughly paved with large fragments of stone. In one corner was a fire of peat or turf, a rough bench, a table, and on a shelf against the wall a few rude articles of cookery, a tin saucepan, a coffee-pot, and a few plates and knives, and forks. On another shelf was bread, a ham, some bottles and flasks, and other such odds and ends. There was also a large pitcher of water.

Here and there against the wall nails and pegs had been driven into the mortar. From these hung stray articles of saddlery and clothing, odd pieces of rope, and other such lumber. The only other article of furniture remaining visible was a chest with a padlock.

And yet the place was not wholly devoid of decoration. An almanack had been somehow fastened against one of the walls, and in another place hung one of those strange works of art, neither picture nor bas-relief, by the use of which the Greek Church technically escapes the worship of images. Below this, again, hung a small coarse rosary.

The further end of the room was divided off by a curtain of old drugget. This one of their captors drew back, and pointed to what did duty for a bedroom. There were a couple of crazy iron bedsteads, each with a paillasse and a large blanket. Beyond this the place was bare. The light which they had seen had proceeded partly from the fire and partly from a miserable lamp also stuck against the wall of the larger chamber.

One of the two men effectually closed the door by buttressing it with a beam, for it had neither lock nor bolt. Then he took down one of the flasks and a rough

drinking-vessel. He pulled out the little plug of wool, deftly jerked away the few drops of oil in the neck, and poured himself out about half the contents of the bottle. This allowance he finished at a draught, tapped himself on the chest to indicate that the liquor was harmless, and in fact did him good, and then with the greatest politeness handed the flask and the drinking-vessel to the ladies, hospitably indicating the more solid resources of the larder by a wave of his hand.

> *"He was the very mildest-mannered man*
> *That ever scuttled ship or cut a throat."*

It was useless for Marcia and her companion to weep. It was equally out of the question to laugh. The matter had long passed beyond a joke.

"The only thing to do, my dear," said Marcia, "is to make the best of it. We can't show fight, and we can't escape, and we should never get back if we tried. All we must do is to possess our souls in patience."

Acting upon this excellent advice, the two ladies who were really hungry made the best of a bad job. The wine, of which they did not know the name, was, I may mention, *Barola*. It is a coarse, vigorous kind of Burgundy, and some people like it. The bread was fresh, and fairly good. The cheese was of goat's milk, with a flavour of heather in it. They ate their meal in silence, while their janitors made their own preparations for the night, dragging out from a corner some ruinous sacks, apparently stuffed with straw, and arranging them before the fire.

Then, as Marcia and the Fräulein withdrew behind the curtain and closed it after them, the two vagabonds found their tongues and began to chatter volubly and energetically.

It was but a broken sleep that fell to our friends' lot, although they were wearied beyond endurance. The

surroundings were filthy and repulsive. The warmth of the fire called into existence a fearful combination of evil odours. The only comfort was in the flicker of the fire, and in the feeling that for some hours at any rate they were in no immediate danger.

"We shall be sure to be rescued somehow, my dear," said the Fräulein cheerfully, thinking of Lord Norwich, but not daring to tell Marcia of her pious ruse.

"I hope so," replied Marcia. "But I do not exactly see how." And then nature asserted herself, and little by little the two women fell asleep.

Meantime there was much going on in Athens. Of course when the ladies did not reappear all kinds of rumours got afloat. For an ordinary Italian, even a Neapolitan is a mere novice at gossip, rumours, and surmises compared with these descendants of Homer's heroes.

The extraordinary thing was that nobody seemed to be very much disquieted. General opinion in wine-shops and elsewhere induced to the belief that the unfortunate English ladies must have lost their way in the fog. This comfortable view of the matter was dispelled by the appearance of the guide without his charges.

The guide had nothing to say at the corner of the street or in the wine-shops, nor could any persuasions induce him to let out what had happened. He contented himself when asked what he knew with an emphatic "then! then! then!" and therewith disappeared into the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIX

Once inside the hotel so many questions were put to the unhappy guide, and he himself was still so confused and terrified by the events of the day, that it was extremely difficult to ascertain exactly what had happened beyond the fact that the ladies were detained, and that a ransom was demanded for them.

The guide's agitation confused the place and the circumstances, and multiplied the number of the brigands so that they grew like those of Falstaff's cohort of men in buckram. The man seemed to be thoroughly scared out of his wits. Even the landlord could extract nothing definite from the fellow, and accordingly handed him over to Mr. Clift, with instructions to administer to him moderate rations of meat and drink, and to report the recovery of his senses as soon as that event might occur. This duty the worthy Clift undertook with a face sufficiently showing that he fully grasped the situation in all its gravity.

Now it so happened that Lord Norwich and his friend Captain Markby having made a more than usually good bag of snipe and curlew, and having also done justice to an English dinner of beefsteak and onions, were seated smoking under the verandah of their restaurant, Markby with a sturdy wooden pipe, his constant companion on shooting expeditions, and Norwich with a cigarette.

Presently they became aware that something had occurred. People were talking sagely together in knots; there was a general appearance of lively interest, not to say excitement, and ragged newsboys were yelling out

evening editions of the *Lamp of the Acropolis*, the *Salaminian Star*, and of that most respectable journal the *Athenian Sentinel*.

Out of mere curiosity Markby invested a few pieces of copper, and turned one of the papers over. Something in it seemed to strike him, for he hastily put it down and looked to see if it was confirmed by the others. Then he folded all the journals up together and found words.

"You do not speak Romaic, Norwich?"

"You know I don't, nor read it."

"Well, then, just listen. It seems to me there has been some mischief. It is not serious as yet, but it may become so. I know these scoundrels, cowards, and thieves to the backbone, every mother's son of them. Now it seems that a gang of blackguards a little outside the city have actually had the impudence to get hold of a couple of English ladies and to demand a ransom for them with all manner of threats."

Lord Norwich sprang from his chair, and from mere instinct clutched at the papers. As soon as the type met his eye he threw them aside.

"What is it?" he almost shouted at Markby. "Tell me at once."

"Come with me," was the answer, "and I will."

The two men walked away slowly down the street, and in the middle of the road. I had better give what Markby had to say as nearly as may be, and not disturb its current with the interruptions of his companion.

First of all Markby briefly explained the situation, and added that the story was no doubt true. He did not think that there was any cause for serious alarm. Obviously, however, something must be done at once. As a matter of public duty he was strongly opposed to paying blackmail. On the other hand, he had not the remotest confidence in any Greek official whatever. The police and the

gendarmes themselves were in all human probability in league with the robbers.

"I think, Norwich," said he, "that we may as well pull this little matter through for ourselves. I am sure you would like to play Perseus yourself, and I should enjoy the fun. These fellows are arrant curs, and I vote that you and I settle this business in our own way. First of all, let us make inquiries. Meantime you go down to the yacht. Now listen, and hear what you are to bring back. In the first place, I want our second officer, who is a cool hand and can be trusted. We must have a rifle each, and say three dozen cartridges. Bring my double barrel —the old African one—and a dozen buckshot cartridges for the smooth barrel. You had better also let Harrison bring a revolver for each of us, and tell him to ram some cartridges into his pocket. I will look out for horses. You be as quick as you can, and meet me here. If I am not here, wait till I come."

By the time that Markby had got horses, Norwich and Harrison had made their appearance. Then Harrison was left in charge of the beasts and baggage, while Norwich and Markby proceeded to the hotel, at which, according to the papers, the English ladies had been staying. Here Markby went in alone and saw the landlord.

The interview was not a long one, but Markby returned from it with a strange expression on his features. If you had known him you could have read in them intense interest and anxiety, together with a very resolute determination to carry through to the end the business he had got in hand. If you had not known him, you would merely have put him down for an Englishman somewhat out of temper and correspondingly aggressive.

Markby drew Norwich on one side.

"Has the Miss Conyers of whom you told me a German lady, a friend of hers?"

"Yes, Fräulein Dietz. Good heavens, man, why?"

"Because," answered Markby very quietly, "it is Miss Conyers and Miss Dietz, and no one else, whom these scoundrels have got."

Norwich turned pale, and for a moment staggered as if he had been struck by a heavy blow. Then recovering himself, he asked hoarsely, as if there might still be room for doubt, "Are you quite sure?"

Markby nodded. "Say nothing, my dear fellow. We will save them, or rather you shall pull this matter through yourself. Just let us have five minutes for a council of war." And the two men turned away down the street.

"First," said Markby, "there are three of us. There will certainly not be half a dozen of these blackguards. Possibly fewer, for they cannot trust one another, and we three are more than a match for them; better armed, stronger, and with nothing to fear. The scoundrel of a guide must be our fourth, and for him I have got everything ready. I have given him a revolver lent me by the landlord, which he has loaded himself, and of which he is very proud. As we do not want his assistance, and as I do not trust him, I have taken means of my own to render the instrument perfectly harmless. I have told him we are ready to pay the ransom that is demanded, and have shown him gold and notes in a belt round my waist. It would be odd, wouldn't it, if the pieces were to stop a half-spent bullet? I have known them to do so before now. We are to start an hour before daybreak. And that's all."

"Why delay an instant? Why not start at once?" broke out Norwich impatiently.

"No good. Only lose our way in the dark and fog, and ride our horses off their legs into the bargain. No, my boy, lie down and sleep, if you can. Don't smoke and don't drink, you must keep your eye in. If you want anything, and have given up the idea of sleep, try coffee and a biscuit. I myself shall sleep till bugle-call."

They first after this went round to see Harrison and the horses. Now there are more ways than one in which a horse can be got at. Some of them are known to jockeys and racing touts, most of them to gipsies, and all of them, so I firmly believe, to Greeks, from a dose of shot or an untimely bucket of water, to a ligature round the fetlock or a small nail hammered in between the frog and the hoof. The horses, however, proved to be all right, and Markby completed the arrangements by looking himself all over the stable in which the beasts were lodged for the night, and in which, for better security, Harrison slept in charge, in a rickety but large and comfortable chair.

Norwich was sufficiently worn out with excitement to fall asleep upon the sofa. Markby sat down in an easy chair, and lit his pipe.

"A little tobacco," he said to himself, "and a suspicion of cognac and water, will do just as well for me as any amount of sleep. The boy will be better for sleep if he gets it. I don't think I ever felt fitter in my life. Gad, how I wish I had got one or two of my old men with me. However, there will probably not be a shot fired. If there is, we must manage to drop our first man. I'll bet the others won't stop to pick him up."

And with these reflections, somewhat singular for so warm-hearted a man, Markby indulged in the luxury of a dog-sleep, with one eye always more or less open.

CHAPTER XXX

It was an early start in the morning. Mists were hanging over everything—over the peaks of the hills, over the roofs of the houses, over the yards and rigging of the vessels in the harbour. It was what Scotsmen term a soft day.

Markby, after a critical look round, extracted from his baggage waterproof cases for his locks, and handed a sufficient supply to his companion. When it is man to man and life for life, a waterproof over your lock may make all the difference, if you have a long journey to ride.

Some four miles out of the city the guide took it upon himself to stop the party.

"We are nearly there," he said, "and I can manage the matter in a moment."

Markby looked at him and laughed. "If we are nearly there," said this old stager, "we can manage the matter when we get there. Meantime if you have any nonsense I will blow your brains out. You may consider yourself my prisoner. If you stop your beast, or dare to get out of your saddle, I will bowl you over like a partridge."

Now this was turning the tables with a vengeance, and the guide began at once to chatter in Romaic, continuing his allocution for several minutes. When he had finished, Markby looked at him again and nodded, as if to say, "I understand you." Then each man for a few seconds took the measure of the other. After this comparison of forces the guide kept his opinion to himself and went on.

At last they reached a place utterly desolate, where four roads met, and here oddly enough was a young Greek sitting upon a wall by the roadside. It would really have seemed that there is nothing to do in Greece but to build walls and then to sit upon them.

Markby, however, knew what was meant by the apparition of this shrimp of a boy. Evidently he was nothing more than a vedette. So the veteran gave him a broad piece of silver for himself, and a second coin of similar value to show to the higher powers in case the first might be lost by accident.

The boy was a true Greek. He would have sold the remains of his own mother for what they might fetch for any purpose, and have boiled down her bones for glue.

There is a vulgar phrase in the English language which I mean to use. This young descendant of the companions of Pericles tumbled to the situation. Taking in the *cortége* with a critical eye, he held up three fingers and then winked. Then with a look at the guide as sharp as a flash of lightning, he held up his hand with the little finger and the thumb doubled down.

Markby grinned, and again threw the little scoundrel some silver. Thereupon, the pieces having been picked up, the young Greek prudently went to the rear. I do not know the exact Romaic equivalent for "larks ahead," else I should give it.

Five minutes further on and a Greek slung himself over a hedge by the side of the road, and pointed a matchlock which might have dated from the days of the Peloponnesian war. Markby at once covered him with his revolver.

Now business began. Markby threw himself from his horse, Norwich did the same. Harrison without hesitation followed the example of his master. The three men stood together. They can hardly be called a little English square, because at the best they only constituted

a triangle. It was a critical moment, but Markby solved the difficulty. He drew his revolver, calmly picked out a large stone and let fly at it. Fragments of granite flew to right and left, and a splash of lead remained plastered upon the stone itself.

Having thus expressed his opinion, Markby reloaded the vacant chamber.

The sound of firearms seemed to produce a considerable effect. One dirty and ill-clad Greek displayed a fraction of his head from behind a thorn-bush. Another had apparently been hiding behind a heap of stones; another was, of course, a harmless labourer, with a weapon over his shoulder that seemed like nothing so much as an old hay-scythe at the end of a clothes-prop. The sight of this formidable instrument seemed to amuse Markby and reassure him.

"All in safety, go ahead!" he roared out to Norwich. "Barkers ready, and right we are."

At this moment, although they had not noticed it, they were at the very door of the shanty.

"Here we are, for a tenner!" cried Markby. Nor did he wait to knock at the door. It was locked or otherwise barred.

Now there are two ways of bursting open a door that is shut against you. One is to lean your back against it and trust to your weight. This is foolish, because if the door gives way you tumble inwards upon the top of it, and are at once at the mercy of the fortress, with your head within their direct reach to be kicked at or otherwise dealt with. Another way is to draw back a few paces, run at the door with your whole weight, and then in foot-ball fashion drive the sole of your right foot against the lock of the door, using your right leg as if it were a battering-ram. This method Markby used. He brought down the door and with it the door-post.

Then ensued a more or less free fight. It is difficult

to tell what is going on when bullets are flying. Nor are bullets absolutely necessary. For a boy with an old fowling-piece and a handful of shot may hit you in the face or in the thigh, and at once put you *hors de combat*. Then, too, there is the smoke, and the report as each weapon is discharged.

> "*It has a sharp, short sound upon the ear,*
> *That cocking of a pistol, when you know*
> *That the next minute brings its sight to bear*
> *Upon your person, at twelve yards or so.*"

But as a mere matter of fact, Norwich, whose blood was now thoroughly up, was as reckless as if he had been heading a charge at football. Markby, calm and wise, reflected that every bullet has its billet. In a certain way he was a fatalist, and he was quite easy in his own mind as to the result of what he would have termed the row, being perfectly sure that there was a better fate in store for him than to be shot like a fox in a grip, by a Greek footway-pad.

As he forced his way into the little den he drew himself up and covered the door. This was kind of him, and it was the sort of grace that sits well upon men past their prime. He wished to give Norwich the whole credit of entering first.

The next minute Norwich and Marcia were face to face. If I told this story in the ordinary way I should say that they were locked in each other's arms. Nothing of the sort happened. Lord Norwich did not even hold out his right hand.

"Here we are, Miss Conyers!" he shouted out. "Here we are, Fräulein; God bless you! Old Xavier's up behind me. Don't worry. Out we are in a minute. Out into the open air both of you," and he added some very vulgar remarks reflecting upon the flavour of the cottage as it met his unaccustomed nostrils. "These ruffians have all

cut and run," he went on, "except one that my old friend has grassed."

In a moment the two women were in the road. Markby and Norwich were with them. Harrison was at a respectful distance, and the guide, in obvious terror of his life, at a good distance behind Harrison.

A battle over, you must count your forces. The company closed up, and mustered as follows:

Norwich, Markby, and Harrison were all well armed, and fit for further fight. These were the convoy.

Next came Marcia and the Fräulein, and last was the guide, who apparently expected to be shot somehow before the day was over, being by this time worse than useless, and indeed an imbecile incumbrance.

Marcia and the Fräulein were somehow mounted. Their side-saddles could not be found, and it is a difficult matter to mount a lady unless you have a side-saddle. It is also a dangerous matter, for, without a back-crutch to assist her, she may fall over upon the back of her head, and in fact kill herself. It is no part of my duty to explain in detail how Marcia and Miss Dietz managed without the articles in question; but as Markby observed, "When you have not got a thing, and cannot possibly get it, it is not at all difficult to go without it."

The guide took a horse to himself, and led another. Harrison stalked ahead in order to warn the party of the approach of danger. Markby and Norwich ought to have acted as rear-guard, but before a quarter of a mile had been covered, Markby was chatting to Miss Dietz about the cottage and everything in it, and about everything else, while Norwich was walking along by Marcia's side.

Now or never was the chance for a lover. The Frenchman of romance would have produced a reserve pistol, and have threatened terrible things to himself. A German would probably have quoted Goethe. Lord Norwich,

instead of catching at his opportunity, talked about the weather. This, of course, proves up to the hilt that he was a stupid Englishman. This is exactly what he was. And the wide world at large would be a good deal better with a larger allowance of such stupid young Englishmen let loose upon it.

All this may seem dull and prosaic. But there was much of poetry in it notwithstanding. When the cavalcade got into Athens, and the ladies were left at the door of their hotel, Markby and Norwich turned off upon their heels.

"I want," said Markby, "to get the dust out of my throat."

When Marcia and the Fräulein were alone in their rooms, the Fräulein, pending the arrival of hot water, plumped herself down into a chair, and made a remark.

"My dear," she said, "I think you have been a fool long enough, and now that our throats have not been cut, it is high time you mended your ways. As for that dear Captain Markby, if I can get him alone in a corner and quite in the dark, I shall kiss him. I'm an old woman, and it won't do him any harm."

Marcia threw herself into a chair, and burst out crying. If I were her enemy and were spiteful, I should say that she howled. There are so many phrases by which it is possible to describe the ever-varying fluctuations of the female mind.

Fräulein Dietz took the effusion on the part of her young friend with extraordinary stolidity. In fact the Fräulein actually smiled. "After the storm," she said to herself, "comes the calm." And then she took her cup of tea like a sensible woman as she was.

CHAPTER XXXI

HAVING left the ladies, Norwich and Markby turned towards the harbour, having sent Harrison on ahead to see to the boat. About halfway Norwich staggered for a moment, and clutched at Markby's arm. Markby instinctively caught hold of him.

"What is the matter?"

"I don't know. I want to sit down."

There was a *café* close by, and Markby, taking things into his own hands, hurried Norwich into it. Norwich, reaching a divan, sat down. Then he lay down at full length.

"My right arm is gone," he said. "I fancied as much at the moment."

"Good Heavens! Why have you said nothing about it?"

"I didn't want to worry Miss Conyers," he answered.

And indeed it was now evident that his right arm was helpless.

"I felt something," he explained, "at the time, in the middle of all the row, as if I had knocked my elbow, but it was only for a moment. Now I am pretty sure I have been hit. There is a lot of pain, and it's getting stiff."

Markby, cool as ever, at once sent for the proprietor of the *café*, and ordered him to send out forthwith for an English surgeon, or *faute de mieux* a French. Then he busied himself with the patient.

"Right you are, my dear boy. Broken arm it is, at

the worst. Mademoiselle, scissors, please." With them he cut off the sleeve of the right arm immediately below the shoulder and laid the limb bare. "Ugly wound," he thought to himself. "Round bullet luckily," he said, "not conical. Gone in just above the wrist. Wrist is safe, anyhow. Gone right through the muscle up into the biceps. Lucky for you that you have a good muscle for a bullet to corkscrew through, else you would have had a stiff elbow for the remainder of your days; perhaps have had inflammation and lost your arm. As it is, all will be right."

Here as tenderly as a nurse he flexed the elbow-joint, and satisfied himself it was sound.

"It will be somewhere up by the shoulder-blade," he said critically. "Probably a little below. When these blessed bullets once get into you, it's wonderful how they ricochet. It hasn't cut the radial artery, or you would have dropped long ago. It can't be more than a flesh-wound. But we won't let these surgeons here make a job of it. We'll save the limb, old fellow."

By this time the surgeon had arrived. He was what in England you would term a general practitioner—a young man with families upon his books, skilled in infantile maladies, learned in anatomy, but of little use in practical surgery. He accordingly deferred to Markby. And in this he showed his wisdom. He is a young gentleman who will get on.

With the aid of a couple of poles the divan was converted into a litter, and Norwich was carried down to the yacht. Then the young surgeon produced what looked like a piece of tarred rope, and thrust it into the hole in which the bullet had entered, working carefully and tenderly away with it as if he were cleaning out some priceless gun-barrel.

Next he handled and felt the elbow-joint as Markby

had done, and nodded with grave satisfaction. Then he began to lovingly caress and pinch the arm between the elbow and the shoulder, until his thumb rested upon the bullet, deeply buried in the solid muscle of the limb.

"We had better have it out at once," he whispered to Markby. "It is only a matter of minutes, or in fact seconds. No need for two shocks to the system. The first shock is not over yet; we will let the two fevers of recovery lump themselves together."

"Right you are, sir," answered Markby, while Norwich gratefully looked assent, for he had overheard.

"No need for chloroform," said the young surgeon. "Look at the ceiling. Take this napkin between your teeth, and if I hurt you, bite it like the devil. Whatever you do, don't try to look at my hands, or else you'll upset me."

Out came a small knife, which would have been a treasure to a schoolboy, a pair of pincers or pliers, a sponge, and a little bottle of carbolic acid, from which Markby without instructions prepared a dilution of the requisite strength. The whole thing was like magic. There was just a spurt of blood from the skin, and an involuntary twitch of the muscles. The next second the surgeon had the bullet in the palm of his left hand.

Then he pumped more carbolic acid and water through the wound, flushing it, if I may say so. Then he clapped a piece of lint on to the orifice at each extremity, and, so simple is science in its highest aspects and its most beneficent, fastened down the lint with ordinary diachylon plaster, which he warmed over a wax-match from Markby's smoking stores. Then he bandaged up the limb with a long tape-like piece of calico, and placed it in a sling extemporised from the patient's necktie.

"Keep on your back," he said; "drink good milk with iced water; no wine or spirits or tobacco. You will be all right, and probably be able to play billiards in a week. There is a wonderful luck in all things. A quarter of an inch here or there, and this simple little matter might have puzzled a Sir William Bennett. But healthy as we are, we mustn't holloa till we are out of the wood. And no talking," added the surgeon. "If he wants to talk, give him a tract to read. If he won't read that, send up into the city for the English parson. He is a perfect narcotic in his way."

Hereat Norwich looked gratefully at the doctor, Markby chuckled, and the young surgeon took his leave, with a promise to call the next morning, and to hold himself generally in readiness should any complications arise. He also administered a little sleeping-draught of which I know the secret.

There is morphia in it, Indian hemp, prussic acid, and a suspicion of chloroform. But I will not divulge a mystery which is protected by letters patent.

Its effect upon the patient after all the excitement and the suppressed excitement was almost immediate. Lord Norwich felt creeping over him a general sense of warmth and comfort. Then he began to imagine that he was floating in an open boat upon a tropical sea, with an infinite vault of blue above him. Then in a dim kind of way he seemed to become conscious of music. Ultimately his consciousness melted away and he rested.

* * * * *

When the young man woke up his eyes wandered round. The opiate had for a while broken the continuity of his existence.

Little by little things came back to him. That was

Markby serenely occupied with a newspaper. So far good. Then there was a little old-fashioned lady whom he seemed to recollect, busied with a tangle of Berlin wool and an armoury of steel needles. Perhaps she might be a trained nurse.

But in a corner of the cabin was a third figure. He looked at it, and looked again. He was still drowsy with the drug. However, there could not possibly be any mistake. It was his own cabin. His arm was helpless. It must be the injured arm. It was no dream. So he again turned his eyes on the strange figure.

"Marcia, Miss Conyers, Marcia."

"Yes, Lord Norwich"—and she turned her great eyes upon him. "You must keep quiet. If you talk all of us are to go away. Please don't drive us away." Which (as Americans would say) sounded almost too good to be genuine.

But of course the Fräulein was bound to cut in.

"You young people," said she with a terrible shake of her head, "have been misconducting yourselves. This is what comes of painting pictures, is it? No more pictures for me. I set my face against them henceforth. Lord Norwich, you have got to live on slops for a month and a day, and after that you may perhaps be allowed to smell beef-tea. Marcia, my dear, you have got to hold your tongue, and to be thankful that you've got a tongue left to hold. Let it be a warning to you. I believe I heard one of those brutes say something about sending your tongue in a parcel to the English Minister."

And then the little woman, without any fuss or disturbance, somehow managed to sponge Lord Norwich's forehead with eau-de-cologne and water, and wash his hands and comb his hair, and freshen him up with dabs of toilet vinegar. At all of which proceedings Mr. Harrison looked on from the companion, respectful and admiring, but not the less taciturn, and to a certain extent jealous.

"If his Lordship is to be valeted," said Mr. Harrison to himself, "I think the job is in my billet, or ought to be."

Vanity in its mild form of a mere excess of *amour propre* is perfectly compatible with the utmost fidelity and kindliness.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE morning after the operation the condition of the patient had not improved, and the doctor fell bound to tell Markby as much, and in fact to express his opinion frankly that the situation would be worse than critical were it not for the good constitution and what he technically termed the "clean flesh" of the patient.

"I will not say that I am seriously frightened," he concluded, "but we must not make light of the case. He is a young man, and that, of course, in the main is in his favour. On the other hand, it is a little against him. Can't you understand what I mean? I rather think he wants something more than either you or I or that excellent servant of his can do for him. Who, sir, can minister to a mind diseased, or cure a fever that wants not drugs but a philtre? Birds in the air, you know, carry scraps of news even to medical men. Do you read poetry?"

Markby shook his head emphatically, and the doctor departed.

Within an hour the doctor's assistant and dresser came down with some flowers and fruit for the patient. He also brought a small parcel for Markby.

"It's a book," said Markby as he opened it, "and by Jove it's poetry. Not much in Norwich's line or mine. What the deuce is it? Tennyson's "Princess." Never read it. Page turned down, too. What is the fellow about?"

Markby perched himself upon the cabin-table and read:

"Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white,
Now winks the gold fin in the porphyry font.
The firefly wakens. Waken then with me.

"Now folds the lily all her sweetness up
And drops into the bosom of the lake,
So fold thyself, my dearest, then, and drop
Into my bosom, and be lost in me."

He studied the context, and saw daylight. "No fool that doctor," he muttered. "Man of the world. Knows what he's about."

And there was another page turned down.

"Thy voice is heard through rolling drums,
That beat to battle where he stands;
Thy face across his fancy comes,
And gives the battle to his hands.
One moment, while the trumpets blow,
He sees thy brood about his knee,
The next, like fire he meets the foe,
And strikes him dead for thine and thee."

There were no more pages specially recommended, so that Markby felt very much like Captain Cuttle. He had overhauled the volume, and there he had found it. Now how was he to act upon it? Whom should he speak to?—Marcia herself, or the Fräulein, or Norwich, or all three, or any two? and if the last course, then to which two? "This kind of business is beyond me," he growled. "And yet I have got to tackle it at once."

That afternoon fever set in, and the patient began to wander in his mind. He was playing football at Eton; he was on parade at St. James's Palace; he was on guard at the Bank; he was back again at the far West trying conclusions with a grizzly. Then he was buying pictures. So he settled down into the one vein of wandering that

was most distressing. Still the fever did not threaten so gravely as it might have done.

Marcia and Miss Dietz of course came down to make inquiries, and saw Markby. The veteran did all he could to quiet Miss Conyers' alarm; talked hopefully; said in a few days no doubt Norwich would be able to see his friends. At present it was of course impossible, as he was delirious. Meantime they must all be patient, and so he conducted them back to their hotel.

At the door he announced that he had some purchases to make, and some things to order; fruit, ice, and so forth; extracted from Marcia the admission that she was tired, and boldly proposed to Miss Dietz that Marcia should go in and rest, and that she should come with him, and give him the benefit of her experience and advice on his shopping.

It was impossible to refuse, and the Fräulein had no inclination to do so, and away the two went together.

Markby now had the ball at his feet, and began to make the running with it. The Fräulein was no match for him. Before she exactly understood what they were talking about, or in what direction they were going, or what it exactly was that they were bent on purchasing, the wily old campaigner was twisting Miss Dietz this way and that, and actually making her give to him as her opinion and view of the situation what of course he ought properly to have suggested himself.

It is the old conjuror's trick of forcing a card upon you so deftly that you fairly believe you have chosen it yourself.

Miss Dietz expanded like a rose under sunshine. She had always known it, she had always said it, she had always felt it. She supposed she had eyes in her head as well as other people. She was quite agreed with Captain Markby, that the thing could only end one way. No Solomon was needed to arrive at that conclusion.

"I really begin to agree with you, Miss Dietz," observed her companion.

"How provoking you are, Captain Markby! On the contrary, it is I who am agreeing with you."

"Anyhow, we are of one mind," said Markby, "and I think that settles the matter. If he pulls through—and I don't say he will—we shall be all right. No doubt about that. But if he is to pull through, his mind must be made easy as soon as he comes to himself. Otherwise," sagaciously added the Captain, "there will be a relapse, and if that happens there will be the English cemetery here. Better employ the parson for the other business. Eh, Miss Dietz?"

"You cannot mean that he is so seriously ill," said the little woman with tears in her eyes, and beginning to get greatly alarmed. "Surely the doctor cannot have said that."

"That is exactly what the doctor *has* said," answered Markby. "He has spoken to me, Miss Dietz, as frankly and as unreservedly as I have spoken to you and you to me. 'There is something on his mind, Captain Markby,' he said to me this afternoon, 'and unless his mind is set at ease his chances of recovery are more than doubtful. I can't give him a dose of resignation, or two teaspoonsful of hope. I can attend to his wounds, I can attend to his ailments. With all the advantages he possesses he ought to get through, and would do so if he had not been dying of love for that young woman.'"

"I have always sympathised with Lord Norwich," said the Fräulein. "I have done my best to induce Marcia to listen to his proposals. But at the same time no man among you ever yet died of love."

"Perhaps not," replied Markby. "But love sometimes brings on fever, and they die of that."

There was nothing more to be said. A perfect

understanding had been arrived at. All that had now to be done was to complete the purchases, to supplement them with a few other things which suggested themselves, and to get back to the yacht. The fly was loaded, and the Fräulein fully busied in the capacity of supercargo.

When they regained the yacht, they found Harrison, the skipper, and the surgeon waiting for them with very grave faces. The news was about as bad as could be. The patient was distinctly worse. The fever and delirium were aggravated. "There is a chance still," said the doctor, "but I don't think we shall save him. In fact it is only a chance."

Markby could hardly retain his control. Poor Miss Dietz fairly broke down, and was driven back to the hotel in the most pitiful condition. Once alone with Marcia she gave way hopelessly. After all, the events through which they had been hurried had been enough to unstring nerves far less sensitive than those of the kindly German lady.

"What is it?" asked Marcia, thoroughly terrified. Then she looked at Miss Dietz and turned pale. "Pray speak at once. I can't bear this suspense."

"He is dying," said the Fräulein. "God help and forgive us all."

CHAPTER XXXIII

STRANGE things are told us by those whose fate it has been to pass into the shadow of death and return from it, as happens to those who have been taken from the water apparently lifeless and have yet recovered.

They tell us that for a while is a terrible sense of agony and oppression, as if the brain were bursting. Then comes a blaze of blinding light, and there follows a sort of swoon or dream in which the whole of their past life seems to repeat itself, and to stand clearly and intelligibly as a record waiting for judgment. And indeed most of us have had some experience of this kind. For it often happens that a dream seems to last for many hours. Events crowd themselves together in it. Long processions defile before us. Whole dramas are played out. And yet we know that our sleep has been but for minutes, or it may be for seconds only.

And so before Marcia the whole past arranged itself—a past now beyond recovery. It was she, she felt, in the exceeding bitterness of her soul, who alone and through all had been guilty of all this burden of woe. At her door lay the death of the man who, to save her from worse than death, had gone forth with his life in the hollow of his hand and thrown it away. And she broke into a loud and bitter cry, and hid her face in her hands.

Then recovering herself she rose, hurried on a shawl and light hat, and without a word passed out into the street. Looking neither to right nor to left, she went steadily on as if sleep-walking or in a trance, and the

Fräulein, wondering and fearful, followed her with a heavy heart.

Unobserved and unnoticed they sped rapidly past house and shop along the quay, and so over the bridge on to the yacht's deck, where the men fell back to right and left and gave them way. Still heeding nothing, noticing nothing, seemingly conscious of nothing, she stepped along the deck to the hatch and descended into the cabin.

Markby and the doctor, who were seated, rose as she entered. The latter bowed gravely, and then resumed his seat. Markby held out his hand as graciously as was possible, for he was a warm-hearted man; and although in his heart he held Marcia's obstinacy and vanity to be the sole cause of all that had happened, he yet could not at such a moment find it in him to embitter things by any idle show of anger.

Marcia, throwing off her hat and shawl, stepped straight to the bed, on the coverlet of which lay in its bandages the wounded arm. The patient's eyes opened wearily and fixed themselves upon her for a moment. Then the lids fell over them again. She bent over him as a mother over a sleeping child, and kissed his forehead. Then she sat down by his side and took the other hand in hers.

So she sat motionless, nor was there a sound to be heard in the cabin except the rhythmical beat of the chronometer slinging in its case, and from without the confused murmur of the harbour; the plash of the water, the groaning of masts and yards and the creaking of cordage, and now again the voice of some sailor or other harbour-hand hailing another or shouting orders to him.

The doctor again rose, beckoned to Markby, and passed silently up on to the deck and so down on the quay. Markby followed him with the same grave silence.

"It is just his last chance," Mr. Blakey said. "There is immense vitality, and he may yet pull through. Neither

you nor I can do anything. The only mortal aid now, in my belief, is there with him. We shall see. Send for me at any time. I will stay in, or leave word where I am—and I will of course return the last thing, say at midnight." And he shook hands and departed.

Markby, pacing up and down the quay, began to count the hours for the arrival of Sir Samuel Carver, the eminent London surgeon, of whose departure from Dover he had already been advised by telegram.

It had been suggested by Mr. Blakey, the English surgeon, that Sir Samuel should be summoned, and the idea had been jumped at by Markby, who had only been restrained by his military sense of etiquette from at once putting it forward himself.

Sir Samuel Carver had a European reputation. He was surgeon to the King, and consulting surgeon to almost every crowned head in Europe, and he fully deserved the numerous honours and decorations which for the last few years had been showered upon him.

He was a man of about fifty, considerably above the middle height, and of remarkable muscular development, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, with a cold grey eye that never seemed to move, and a hand as steady as a rock. But he was a kind man at heart, however rough in manner, and he had certain small human weaknesses, being addicted to mountain-climbing in perhaps its most arduous form of chamois-hunting, a capital player at pool, which he held to steady the nerves, a judge of pictures, a patron of art, and himself an amateur, although not an exhibitor, of recognised merit.

Until his arrival the weary hours had to be counted. The patient, if he did not perceptibly get better, at any rate did not get perceptibly worse. The old saying, *dum spiro spero*, is never so true as of a young and healthy man in whom life still lingers.

So they waited in hope; Marcia almost motionless at the

bedside, Miss Dietz with a volume in her hand in constant readiness, and Markby in his noiseless deck-shoes coming and going as silently and faithfully and sympathetically as a huge Newfoundland dog.

When Sir Samuel arrived, accompanied by his dresser, he introduced himself to Blakey first, with whom he had four or five minutes' conversation, and then was presented to Markby. After this he proceeded to the cabin. The women were sent up on deck, and there was an anxious interval of about forty minutes.

When at its termination the men ascended to deck and the ladies were sent below again, Sir Samuel expressed himself in terms of guarded hope, recognising Markby as a person having in his own way a rough and ready acquaintance with gunshot wounds, and injuries generally. His opinion, on the whole, was not unsatisfactory. He thought that the worst was over, and that the critical period of inflammation need no longer be feared. With nine young men out of ten, he observed, it would most certainly have been otherwise.

If there was a recovery, *absit omen* for the suggestion of the contrary, there would ultimately be perfect use of the limb. Meantime, what was wanted was a continuance of the care which had been so admirably bestowed, and as to the details of which he had no suggestion to offer. Would he avail himself of the second cabin, which had been specially prepared for him? Yes, he really thought he would. Meantime he would go up into the town for an hour to the Hôtel des Etrangers, which would be handy for his assistant, and would have his dinner there.

So the great man departed with a heart which was sufficiently easy, and did ample justice to an admirable dinner and a flask of Greek wine. In reality he had grasped the situation in all its aspects, and was thoroughly content with his fortune and with the world.

In all probability there would be a recovery more or less

complete, of which the entire credit would naturally fall to himself. If things went otherwise it would have done him no harm to have been called in, and of course there would be no possible question about his fees. And more generally, he hoped things might turn out well. Lord Norwich was a fine young fellow, and reputed an excellent one in every way. The young lady had, so he was given to understand, undoubted genius. He had heard of her achievements with the brush, and she certainly had a fair show of good looks, of which fact he had not been previously aware.

As for her father, with whom Sir Samuel had been slightly acquainted, and who, according to all accounts, had been an idle old vagabond, he had gone to a place from whence he would find it difficult to despatch begging-letters to his son-in-law.

Markby seemed an estimable sort of barrack-room officer, and the old chaperone, whoever she might be, was no doubt discreet and useful. So the doctor, with the aid of his *lachryma*, summed up the situation. Nor did he at all need the generous wine to quicken his wits and give them a kindly turn.

On its better side doctors know far more of human nature than do lawyers, with whom mistrust, commencing as a professional habit, has come to be consciously regarded as the highest of the moral virtues.

CHAPTER XXXIV

For two weary weeks Lord Norwich struggled between life and death. The delirium passed away, but left the patient so weak that it needed all Marcia's tender care, all the devotion of Markby and the Fräulein, and all the unremitting attention of the surgeon, to prevent his life ebbing away.

Sir Samuel remained for three days. "I can do nothing further," said the eminent man in taking leave. "Lord Norwich is in excellent hands. I entirely agree with Mr. Blakey's treatment, and have arranged in consultation with him what is to be done in certain contingencies. I think we may be hopeful. At all events no chance has been thrown away."

Marcia was scarcely ever absent from his bedside. She never seemed to be tired, although the brief hours of sleep that she was able to snatch were few and far between. "If his life is spared," said Mr. Blakey to Markby, "it is more due to that young lady's nursing than to my skill, or indeed to any other cause."

"You will kill yourself, dear child," remonstrated the Fräulein one day, "if you do not take more rest."

"What matter?" replied Marcia, "if I can only help to save him. My life is of little value. It has hitherto been more of a curse than a blessing both to me and to others, and I would willingly part with it, if by so doing I could restore him to health. He has risked his life for me —perhaps lost it. Surely I might do the same for him."

"You would like to please him now," urged the Fräulein. "You would wish to do that, would you not?"

"Of course I should," answered Marcia.

"Well, then, take better care of yourself for his sake. It would make him wretched, perhaps retard his recovery, if he were to imagine what was going on."

"I shall be all right," said Marcia, "have no fear. I am very strong."

But the anxiety and sleeplessness were telling on the young girl all the same, and the Fräulein's solicitude was not without reason.

One day when Marcia was alone with him, Norwich suddenly woke and called her by her name. He had scarcely spoken for days.

"What can I get you?" asked Marcia.

"Nothing, thanks," he replied. "I have been wanting to tell you how grateful I am for all your kindness, but I have not hitherto had the strength to talk."

"Pray don't do so now. You must not exert yourself."

"It will not exert me," he answered. "And I shall be happier when I have said what I want to say. I don't think I shall get over this, Miss Conyers. If I do, it will be through you. Now I wanted to tell you before it was too late, that from the first moment I saw you I loved you. That love has been growing ever since, though I don't think I should have troubled you about it again but for this. You were quite right to refuse me. I don't in the least wonder at your not caring for me. I know I have always appeared at a disadvantage when I have been with you. I think it must have been my affection for you that caused that. Anyhow, I know that I have been conscious of it. However, it is too late now. You will find that I have not forgotten you. I have left you nearly everything that is not entailed. Most of the property—that is the landed property—goes to my uncle. That is right, and as it should be. But you will have some sixty or seventy thousand pounds. That will make you independent, and remove any anxiety as to your

future. I shall die happier to think that you are provided for. That is all I have to say. Now kiss me once, my dear one, and I will trouble you no more."

"My darling," cried Marcia, "I will not take a farthing of your money. But you shall get well, nothing shall stop you getting well, and then if you ask me again —and I don't deserve that you should—I will be your wife."

"God bless you, dear," answered Norwich, and his head fell back on the pillow, and he was again unconscious. And Marcia, shedding tears of blood, vowed to herself that if Providence would only give her a chance, she would atone in the future for any unhappiness she had caused this noble young fellow in the past.

"His life shall be one dream of happiness," said the girl to herself, "so far as lies in me." This she swore in her own way. And if there was anything unbefitting a young lady in the words that crossed her mind, I doubt not but that the Recording Angel, of whom our greatest master of pathos has told us, treated them as he treated a like vow under very like circumstances.

* * * * *

The recovery was very slow, and every now and again would for a day or two appear hopeless. But in all surgical cases good nursing, next to the operation itself, is everything, and without it the skill of the surgeon is entirely wasted. In actual warfare, if we leave out of account the men that die under fire or within a few hours after action, it will be found (and any surgeon will frankly tell you as much) that the bulk of those who are lost die from want of proper nursing, rather than from their injuries.

Nursing of the most devoted and constant kind Norwich had. Of Marcia I need say nothing. The Fräulein was indefatigable, and, like Marcia, apparently superior to

every form of human weakness. There was an almost Dutch element in her determination that the whole thing should end well. Men are of only occasional use in a sick-room, and when not actually employed are better out of the way. All, however, that was wanted of them Markby and Harrison did. And, if there be any truth in the belief that occasionally anticipations in some mysterious manner communicate themselves from mind to mind, as the Greeks firmly believed, and on the strength of that belief won their greatest battle against the Barbarian, there was certainly some such "Divine whisper" about in the yacht; and instead of hoping for the best, the crew of the *Cecilia*, from the master down to the boy, were bright and almost confident.

A morning came at last when the young doctor expressed his opinion that the vessel might leave, with due regard to her destination, and indeed went away with the remark that he should look in next morning for a farewell visit, being convinced that change of air would now do more good than anything else.

That evening he got a note from Markby, asking him to look round at an hotel on the quay. He did so, and found Markby comfortable after his own fashion, with cigars and a flask of Chianti. The old campaigner began with general conversation touching the weather, the wine, and more especially the cigars, which he had brought with him from the yacht, and which were the picked produce of the great Baron Rothschild's own home plantation. At last, however, the old veteran came to the point.

"Look here, doctor," he said; "you are wasting your talents in this beastly place. You owe it to yourself to find a better field, and I may say without a compliment that you owe it to the world. Man alive, I am nearly old enough to be your father, and I tell you it's a sin to hide your light under a bushel. Leave your practice here; sell

it or hand it over till you can arrange for the transfer. We want you to come back with us to England, and to see you in London, where you ought to be. Norwich insists on it, and declares that if you won't come away with him, he shall moor the yacht as a hulk and stop with you. Now, pray, feel no false pride in the matter. You have saved his life, and you know it. The obligation he is under to you is not a matter of figures. Come and start in London, and if at the end of your first year there, with his introduction and the story about all over London, you are fidgety about small matters, be as punctilious as you like, and we'll endow a ward in some hospital of your choice or otherwise satisfy your scruples. You will have made enough and more than enough to settle accounts with him that way."

The doctor considered a little, but not for long. He had no ties that at all bound him to Athens. He could adopt Markby's suggestion, and he would, after all, be only borrowing money from a man to whom the sum in question was a trifle, and who had indeed almost forced it upon him. Besides, in an offer of this kind everything depends upon the spirit in which it is made and the surrounding circumstances. The doctor took the sensible course, and accepted the proposal as frankly as it had been made.

Another couple of days sufficed for everything. Mr. Blakey soon arranged for the transfer of his practice, and his private matters were, as those of a bachelor ought to be, in a nutshell. The Consulate undertook to carry out all the details, and Blakey that evening remarked emphatically to Markby, with whom he was now upon more than cordial terms, "They say every man has his chance at least once in his life. Luckily for me my chance has sought me out while I am still young enough to put it to good purpose."

"You'll do that," said Markby, "never fear. And if there is everything on board the yacht our man is

likely to want, the sooner we are out of this place the better."

With sunrise next morning they were out of the place. The ensign was run up. The engines began to pulsate, and the *Cecilia* glided out of the harbour, and once again, like a thing of life, cut her way through the waves, and tossed the white foam from her clear-cut bows.

The saloon was specially reserved for Marcia and Miss Dietz, whom Markby had in his own way captured, and got on board with all their effects, and with a French maid who was anxious to get back to Paris and had jumped at the idea of the trip. Markby when he set about a business carried it out in details, being of opinion that your pawns in chess are as valuable pieces as any other.

Markby, Norwich, and the doctor were of course together in the second cabin. Harrison (I am not speaking with reference to his sleeping-quarters) was everywhere, and rendering himself generally invaluable. It was a peculiarity about this man that he could not possibly be idle. If there was nothing else to be done, he would take up a gun or a pistol on deck and give it a thorough cleaning and overhauling.

How did they amuse themselves? I will tell you one way out of many. The doctor rigged out a little net and towed it alongside. Then he sorted out the catch, and showed Marcia under his microscope marvels of beauty—strange things, neither flowers nor animals, of every tint. He made of them material for a paper on "Certain forms of infusorial life in the Mediterranean," for which in process of time he received a golden medal or two, and a batch of initials to stick after his name if he so pleased.

Marcia with a microscopic camera transferred the creatures to paper. You can see many of them in her

picture of the Diver. Miss Dietz knitted, and allowed Markby to teach her piquet, at which she soon proved herself an adept. So the hours flew by. They dropped the French maid at Marseilles, where they stopped to coal. From Marseilles to Southampton Water is an easy run.

CHAPTER XXXV

Lord Norwich had been steadily improving. Before they had passed Gib. he was able to be propped up with pillows, to be talked to at length, and to talk with discretion on his own account. When a young and strong man fairly begins to mend he mends rapidly, and on the evening that they threw anchor in Southampton harbour the whole party of five sat together for the first time round the table of the saloon, and celebrated their arrival with an English dinner and a round game of cards. Literally a sling and a little care were all that was now necessary.

There was a discussion next morning as to plans, but it was only a discussion, as no one of the party was in a hurry. Norwich and Markby were their own masters, Marcia and the Fräulein were equally independent of circumstances. The business matters of Mr. Blakey were far from being urgent, and would indeed require some little negotiation in London itself. But at the same time it was clear that there must come an end to everything, even to a happy cruise, and the end of this, the most eventful cruise which the *Cecilia* had ever made, or was destined to make, came in this wise.

Markby, the doctor, and Miss Dietz had gone on shore. Why they should all have gone away together I cannot tell, but there must have been excellent reasons for it, or no doubt they would not have done so. And yet they were not apparently altogether at their ease. They had a half-guilty bearing about them as of smugglers or conspirators, and their purchases somehow seemed to

be made with the object of killing time. The Fräulein wanted gloves, and it was difficult to suit her requirements as to colour.

While she was selecting her gloves, Markby and the doctor went to the shop of a jeweller, whose name I need not mention, but who is sufficiently well known in Southampton and London. Oddly enough the jeweller must have been expecting them, for he at once produced some articles of which they expressed their approval.

Let me quote two sentences from Bret Harte's inimitable parody of "Lothair."

"Each of these pearls, my lord, is worth fifty thousand guineas," said Mr. Amethyst, the fashionable jeweller, as he lightly lifted a large shovelful from a convenient bin behind his counter.

"Indeed," said Lothair, carelessly, "I should prefer to see some expensive ones."

The jeweller produced and handed to Markby a ring, which was distinctly "an expensive one." It was a hoop of diamonds and rubies, and it met with Markby's approbation after he had critically examined it stone by stone. The diamonds were unquestionably Brazilian and cut as brilliants, while the rubies were most carefully matched. Probably many people are unaware that rubies, were they only fashionable, would be far more costly than diamonds, as they are much rarer, and are seldom found of so large a size.

As Markby wholly eschewed jewellery himself, even in the light of portable property, and boasted no other ornament than a platinum watch-chain with a stout railway-guard's watch at the end of it, we may safely presume that he was not in the present instance purchasing on his own account.

Meantime Norwich and Marcia had been left alone in the yacht. The former was in a deck-chair; Marcia was seated by one of the saloon windows. They had been talking about many things that had happened since their first acquaintance, and ultimately had ended in silence—not at all a silence of awkwardness or restraint, but a silence none the less.

Norwich was the first to break it. "Marcia, I want you to listen to me for a minute."

Marcia turned her head and eyes towards him. Norwich met her look freely and happily, and then glanced up at the intricately decorated ceiling of the cabin. "Marcia," he continued, "I have twice asked you to marry me, and you have refused me twice. Let me hope there is luck in odd numbers. Let us begin over again from the time when I came to myself and found you sitting by me. Let us begin all over again from that minute, and tell me now, before we leave this place or before I go ashore, that you will be my wife. I can't talk much, but you know how much I love you."

"I cannot answer you," she said, and her throat swelled and she hid her face in her hands. "There is something I ought to tell you, and I cannot tell it you. I cannot tell it to any one."

"I think," said Norwich, "that you will tell it me, my child, and that you will tell it me now, before Markby and the others are back." And he got up, crossed the cabin, and sat down beside her.

Then Marcia briefly but slowly and distinctly told him the whole Paris story exactly as it had happened, from first to last.

Norwich was not, nor have I ever described him as being, a hero of the Guy Livingstone type. He did not indulge in any violent or alarming symptoms of suppressed rage. He knew the man, and was thus the less astonished; and as the tale went on he made up his mind how to act. But

he waited till it had come to its end, and then, like Tennyson's Lord Ronald, "he laughed a laugh of merry scorn," and "turned and kissed her."

"I knew nothing of this," he said, "and I have heard nothing until now. Let us promise each other, Marcia, never through the whole of our lives to speak of it again. I love you all the better for your troubles; and what happened to you might have happened to any girl who trusted a villain."

And so it came to pass that when Miss Dietz and Markby came down the companion they looked at Norwich and at Marcia; and then, somehow, all four were looking each at the other three, and the Old Campaigner shook hands with Norwich first and with Marcia afterwards. And then the good Fräulein, by way of doing something appropriate, threw herself on Marcia's neck and began to weep demonstratively. Whereupon the two men left the cabin and went up on to deck, where they found the doctor waiting for them, who received the intelligence with professional absence of surprise, the full dignity of which he immediately proceeded to mar by unprofessional if not exactly commonplace expression of satisfaction.

"It's an odd thing," said Mr. Blakey. "Plato was a funny old fellow wholly ignorant of anatomy, but there is in one of his dialogues, which I read when a student in the Quartier Latin, a mad kind of attempt to give a theory of love. They are all getting more or less drunk together, and each man propounds his own theory. That of Aristophanes is the funniest. He says that originally man and woman were one, but that the gods for some reason or other got angry with them and cut them in sunder, and that now every man is going about the world seeking for his lost half. If he happens to find it, the marriage is a happy one. It is

a grotesque fable, as grotesque as anything in Rabelais, but there is a vast amount of downright sound common sense in it."

"So there is," said Markby. "Norwich, my boy, we'll hunt up the steward, and crack a bottle of champagne. It will do him no harm, will it, doctor?"

"It will do none of us any harm," answered the doctor cheerily, and they cracked accordingly a couple of bottles as befitted a great occasion.

That same evening Lord Norwich wrote to his solicitors, and briefly stating the position of affairs, desired one of the junior partners to come down at once, explaining that he wished the marriage to take place immediately, and at Southampton.

The man of law was down the next afternoon. It was seldom that Mr. Simple of Fee, Tail, Simple and Fee, thus troubled himself, but the firm had not many such clients as Lord Norwich. Besides, a marriage means not only a marriage settlement, but possibly a resettlement of the estate, and a will, and a number of other such legal formalities. So not only did Mr. Simple come down, but he brought with him a confidential clerk and a tin-box full of the family papers, and he put up at the best hotel in the town in a style befitting the importance of his mission.

The next two days were quiet, but happy and busy. A special licence had to be got in London, on the strength of which it was possible for the marriage to take place on board the yacht. And there were some other things to be looked to—not many, but still important matters—which Markby took in hand himself.

Thus everybody was fully employed, and hours went by like minutes.

The crew, of course, were perfectly well aware of all that was in preparation, and had but one opinion on the matter,

but their air of stolid ignorance did them infinite credit. Nor ought I to forget that their joint present to the bride and bridegroom was, at the sailing-master's happy instance, a travelling watch and aneroid barometer in a compact case, with an inscription neatly engraved on a small plate and affixed thereon.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE marriage service commenced at eleven in the morning exactly. It took place under a large awning on the yacht's quarter-deck, and was witnessed by the crew, who made an admirable congregation, giving the responses, in which they were led by the skipper, each man at the top of his voice, after the most approved nautical fashion.

The Rector of the parish church in which the harbour is situated performed the ceremony, assisted by his curate. The bride was given away by Markby, who looked the part of heavy father to perfection. An old brother officer was best man. The bridesmaids were Miss Dietz and the Rector's daughters, and the company was made up to its complement by a force of officers from Lord Norwich's old battalion, who came down in a body from Wellington Barracks, loaded with the choicest productions of the Avenue in Covent Garden for the better decoration of the extemporised chapel. I had almost forgotten a pleasant little detail. The table which did duty for altar was draped with the vessel's Union Jack. So much for the ceremony.

When the service was over, and the parish registry, brought down *ad hoc* by the clerk, had been duly signed and attested, nothing remained but the breakfast.

Wedding breakfasts, as a rule, are terribly dull affairs. The present banquet was certainly an exception, for the only speech was the health of the bride and bridegroom, given in about fifty words by the Colonel of Norwich's

regiment, and responded to with a brevity equally military by the bridegroom.

The other toasts were drunk without any speeches at all, but everybody was delighted and happy, and everything went well. At last the party broke up, the crew forming a guard of honour on the deck. Mr. Blakey had now to bid his friends farewell, and the only persons remaining on board were, as I must henceforth term them, Lord and Lady Norwich, together with Markby and the Fräulein. The pavilion with its decorations disappeared. The gallant array of bunting was hauled down. The crowd on the quay cheered lustily and melted away. The moorings were cast off, the engines throbbed as if with life, and away went the *Cecilia* on her third and happiest voyage, bending her course once again for the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

The gallant vessel herself seemed to understand the occasion, and to be proud of it. She certainly never bore herself better, or carried, as sailors have it, a neater little bone in her mouth.

* * * * *

The hands that evening did not get drunk in their quarters forward (when Jack so forgets himself, it is his invariable excuse that he has been ashore to see a friend married), but they celebrated the occasion in their own way, with copious libations of hot egg-flip, with which potent beverage a special supper was washed down in the most sailor-like fashion.

Next morning they were out of sight of shore, but it was glorious weather, and they kept full steam ahead the whole day. The four made between them the most delightful family party in the world, and did nothing in the most systematic manner possible. Most of the day was spent on deck. Books of any kind were by tacit consent forbidden. There were cards on board, of course, and a

game of whist was pleasant in the evening. If they talked about anything during the day, it was to plan cruises, or to chat about Norwich's place in Northumberland, and turn over photographs of it with a view to possible pictures.

"If my tenants don't pay up," said Lord Norwich to Marcia, "you will have to work to keep the farm."

Harrison, who regarded idleness with positive aversion, went over the armoury down to its last screw. The only incidents were, that a little flock of petrels followed the vessel, which sailors regard as the very happiest of omens, and that one day they lay-to for twenty minutes to hook a big shark, who kept rolling and rolling over in their wake, and refused to take the heaviest bullet from Markby's rifle as a hint to be off about his business.

Ultimately they moored in Villefranche harbour, where they left the yacht and crew with general shore-leave, and so went on themselves to Cannes.

Now on the evening of their arriavl at Cannes, Norwich and Markby after dinner had a game of billards, for which the injured arm was now sufficiently restored, and after the billiards a cigar and a stroll. Then for the first time Norwich took Markby into his confidence, and told him all that the reader already knows.

Markby's advice was what might have been expected. "You mustn't go out with him," he said; "it's out of the question. Let us suppose you did. However the affair ended, people would always talk about it. If you shot him, as he deserves, they would say his mouth was closed. To give him even a ghost of a chance of shooting you, which no doubt he would very much like to do, would be a wrong thing, and I will be no party to it. He is a man whom nobody believes. Besides, for his own sake he will say as little as possible. There is my advice, and I tell you frankly that you will never talk me into altering it. You could see the thing in the same light

yourself if you were not—and very properly—personally touched. Some punishment will overtake the fellow, you may be sure. Meantime leave him to his own courses. He will come to no good, you may be bound."

"I asked your advice," answered Norwich, "and I shall act upon it. I don't like it, but I am sure it's sound."

"I think it is myself," said Markby. "Here we are at the Club. Let us go in and have a hock-and-seltzer."

It was about dinner-time, and the Club-house was nearly full. Markby met and nodded to several old friends, and Norwich knew some of the men, although his circle was narrower. They looked in at the billiard-room, and then turned into the smoking-room. There comfortably seated in an easy-chair was, as so often happens in this world, the very man of whom they had been talking.

Markby hastily half-drew and half-pushed his companion out of the room. Then he at once returned himself, with a look on his face that meant business.

Now it must be remembered that Lord Henry probably did not know Captain Markby by sight, and was certainly in entire ignorance as to how he had come to Cannes, and in what company.

Markby rang and ordered a brandy-and-soda, which was brought him. Then he rose from his chair, looked straight at the man, took a step towards him, threw the whole of the contents of the glass in his face, and so put the glass itself down.

The men in the room started to their feet and rushed between the two. Those round Lord Henry had to drag him back, struggling and furious. Those round Markby also laid hold of him, but he stood perfectly still.

"I did it on purpose," he said, "and if Lord Henry wishes to know why, he can easily ascertain. My name is Markby, and I am known to some of you here. My only regret is, that this should have happened where it has, and

not in the street. Villiers" (here he recognised a man and turned to him), "you know me, I think?"

"Know you! Perfectly. Have known you for years. Gentlemen," he continued to those who were round about, "I will answer for Captain Markby as I would for myself, and if he is wanted I will undertake to produce him."

Villiers almost lived in the Club, was popular in it, and was also respected. What he said was accepted without hesitation, and the two men left the room amid general silence.

"I want to fight him, of course," said Markby. "If he will not fight me, I will horsewhip him in the public streets. Oddly enough, the quarrel is not exactly my own." Then he said, "If you don't mind coming with me, I will send you to him with a letter." So they went away together, and the letter was written.

"My Lord,

"I am the friend of Lord and Lady Norwich (formerly Miss Conyers), which ought to explain things to you. You cannot possibly want satisfaction half as much as I want to give it you. If you do not want it, I will make it my business to meet you and insult you again. You must either fight me or hide yourself from me. You will find the former course the easier.

"I am your lordship's obedient servant,

"Thomas Markby."

"Take that back to him," he said, "and I will not stir from this place till you return. I am sorry to mix you up in an unpleasant matter."

"Not at all, old chap," was the answer, and the messenger went about his business. Perhaps he meant that the matter was not at all an unpleasant one. Anyhow, he seemed to regard it as a matter of course, and no doubt honestly considered it to be so.

It was two hours before he returned, but Markby hardly took notice of the time.

"I have arranged the whole matter," Villiers said; "we are to meet to-morrow morning at eight, and drive a little way into the country. The precise place we must leave to chance. Any place will do. How shall we spend the time until then? We had better get pistols somewhere first, and then go quietly to bed. You will be none the worse for a good sleep."

While all this was going on, Norwich, almost beside himself with excitement, was walking up and down outside the Club, on the opposite side of the road. At last in despair he turned on his heel, and went back to the hotel. There a messenger was waiting for him with a short letter from Markby.

"DEAR NORWICH,

"It is all right," ran this Spartan epistle, "and will be all over first thing to-morrow. Do not say a word of it to any one. I am staying with my friend Villiers to-night. Every one thinks the affair is mine. If it is not, I have sufficiently made it so, and I can only now ask you as a last favour to do nothing. I have my own idea as to how it will end, and am pretty certain I shall give you a good account of myself.

"Yours aways,

"T. MARKBY."

"I am pretty certain I shall bring him down," said Markby to himself. "If I don't, there is no justice in the nature of things in this world. At all events I will keep my shot, and unless he floors me at once, it will be a baddish look-out for him." And secure in this philosophy, Markby rejoined his second, and the two chatted till dawn. Oddly enough it never occurred to either of them that a surgeon might be wanted.

CHAPTER XXXVII

It was like an English summer's morning when they started. The dew hung and glistened on the hedges. The mist still lay on the low ground. The birds were greeting the new day with a noisy welcome. Appropriate reflections would be very easy at such a juncture; but I am in a position to state that none such occurred to Markby, and I do not myself intend to invent any for him.

His own view of the matter was that he was going out on a perfectly legitimate piece of business, and one that was too important to be hurried over or bungled, although at the same time it could not be got through too expeditiously. And this is the very best possible frame of mind in which a man can go out.

On the spot arranged for meeting a little outside the town they found the other men. Then the two vehicles drove on until a place was hit upon that exactly met the approval of the two seconds.

It was a low, flat, grazing meadow, hidden from the road by a tall hedge. Here they ordered the drivers to wait, and the little company of five, for Lord Henry's second had brought a surgeon, entered the field in silence. The grass was crisp under foot, and heavily hung with large drops of dew that sparkled in the morning sun like diamonds. All around nature was full of life and motion. Out of sight overhead a lark was singing shrilly, and in the damp grass tiny frogs barely emerged from tadpole infantage were hopping about in quest of insects.

In the next field were some tall elms from which came the monotonous murmur of the wood-pigeon, and further off a flock of rooks were returning from their morning's business, chattering noisily to one another, much as do legislators after an important division.

A great ringed snake shot through the grass almost under Markby's feet, and his companion started. "Poor creature," said Markby, "let it alone. It's harmless enough. There are beasts about," he added, as if propounding some abstract theory in mathematics, "far more venomous than that pretty spotted little gentleman," and as he spoke the song of the lark ceased, it folded its wings and dropped to earth.

"We shall startle the poor little fellow in a minute," said Markby. "The grass is uncommonly wet. I think I'll turn up my trousers."

Lord Henry's second was a Colonel Despard, and he and Villiers chose the precise spot and stepped out the paces. Then the two seconds drew back, one on each side, and the two men faced each other.

"At the word 'three,' gentlemen, you will fire," said Villiers, and not before. One two, three," in almost instantaneous succession.

There were two flashes, and two shots were heard. Markby, as he had resolved the night before, had kept his fire. As the smoke curled up into the sky, Markby remained standing on his ground with his pistol in his hand. Lord Henry swayed to and fro for a second, and then fell heavily forward on his face. The seconds and the surgeon ran up to him and turned him over.

The bullet had entered his cheek, close to the nose, and must have pierced the brain, for the limbs were not even twitching, and the pulse had stopped.

"I call you to witness, gentlemen," cried out Villiers, "that this was fairly done. He was killed as the bullet struck him, and his own pistol has been discharged and

is smoking." And then with a bow he hurried back to Markby, and the two passed through the gate and out of the field, leaving the three behind them.

"I have rid the earth," thought Markby, "of one of the most noxious beasts that ever infested it." And not a word was said till they regained the town.

The two men with business-like foresight made all their preparations for departure. It would not have been like Markby to leave any contingency unprovided for. They hurried to the station, and there found Lord and Lady Norwich and Miss Dietz waiting—I had almost said waiting for them. Nor should I perhaps have been altogether wrong, for Norwich had a calm confidence in his friend, while Marcia had grounds of hope which, I suppose, would be considered higher, but which I am constrained to state had not proved any more assuring.

On the journey back to Villefranche they said little or nothing, but Norwich could guess what had happened as well as if he had been present.

If Miss Dietz had any ideas of her own, as perhaps she had, she very carefully kept them to herself.

Villefranche reached, the embarkation was a matter of moments. The news had not preceded them, nor did it in fact arrive until some five hours later in any more substantial form than that of rumour. For the Mayor of Cannes and the Prefect of the Police had to be fetched, and had to visit the field, and had to interrogate the fly-drivers and a number of other persons, all wholly ignorant of the affair, and they had also, French law being very exact, to make a *procès verbal* not only of what each witness knew (which would not have been much), but of what he suspected, which was a very great deal, and of what, to the best of his recollection, he had heard other people say, which was a very great deal more.

And as during ordinary French judicial investigation, it is the practice for everybody to speak at once, the business

took some time, and made all the officials connected with it very sensible of their own importance, and of their zeal for the Republic.

For being an Englishman I am, of course, bound to admit that they do all these things much better and in more business-like fashion in France than over here.

Villiers, even if he had had anything to do, would certainly have abandoned it for a cruise. He thereupon accepted with enthusiasm Lord Norwich's invitation, and thus it happened that by the time the affair was being discussed in the *cafés* and at the corners of the streets, the *Cecilia*, by way of saving the French officials further trouble, was ten miles out at sea. As a matter of fact she was beyond what lawyers call "territorial waters," and there was not the least occasion for any anxiety.

"And if," said Markby to Norwich, "the French Government demands my extradition, and the demand is granted, I shall get at the very most a severe reprimand, with perhaps a fine and a month's honourable confinement in prison, which is rather less than would be given me by an English magistrate if I had horsewhipped the fellow, or by an English County Court judge if I had bought a pair of boots and could not pay for them." And with this summary of the position he went up on deck. They were plunging their way briskly through the water, and the day was as one in an English June.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THEY had started with no certain destination, but within a few hours it was agreed that they should shape their course for Gibraltar, and then settle their plans. As a matter of fact their plans were settled before they reached the Pillars of Hercules.

The yacht needed no single touch or addition to her stores. A few hours were sufficient for Harrison to bring on board a long-boat's load of fruit, vegetables, and other such comforts. Then steam was up again, the granite rocks dipped below the horizon, and when next morning the sun leaped up out of the sea to greet them, they were well in blue water, steering a due course for the true garden of the world; a place none of them had ever seen, a place as far beyond the Riviera in its natural beauty as is the Riviera itself beyond Shanklin; a place where nature is absolutely at her brightest and most beautiful.

If you have read "The Earl and the Doctor," you will have guessed whither they were bent. If not, I may tell you that their destination was Tahiti.

"We will eat fresh cocoa-nuts," said Norwich, "and gather coral and tropical shells, and spear fish on the reefs, and be as happy as kings. I am told that everything there is perfect except the tobacco, the liquor, and the missionaries. Tobacco and liquor we carry ourselves, and as for the missionaries, perhaps they are not altogether so detestable as they are painted. And if they are, we have the remedy in our own hands, and need not let them throw a shadow on the deck."

"They must have a dull time of it, anyhow," said Markby.

"Yes," replied Norwich, "I daresay they will welcome a little genuine brandy and a bottle or so of claret. All their own stuff is vile; even their tobacco, which ought to be good, is worse than *caporal*. But we shall get fish and fruit, and poultry and eggs, and butter and milk, and we shall hardly want more, except ice, with which we must somehow manage to dispense. As for soda, there is the gazogene and any amount of charging powders."

"You must prepare yourself for one disappointment, Lady Norwich," said Markby.

"And that is?" asked Marcia.

"They are, I believe, very badly off for flowers of any kind."

"Then it will be Eden without its roses," she replied.

"You must console yourself with bread-fruit, bananas, custard-apples, fresh guava, and other little things as unseen and unknown in Europe as the Southern Cross itself."

Now I have no intention of describing the South Sea Islands in detail. The thing has been done, and marvellously done, many times since the mutiny of the *Bounty*. Not having seen them myself, I should have to extract the material from books of travel; and I may add that the title of this story is not the "Cruise of the *Cecilia*." Suffice it to say that found all that Markby had promised them. The little Archipelago is, and always will be until the earth shifts the position of its axis, the true tropical garden of the world, the veritable island of the Hesperides. In the Riviera itself you feel comparatively industrious and discontented as compared with your lotos-eating frame of mind in the Pacific.

The mere pleasure of life is sufficient in itself without the worry of sport for men or amusements for ladies. There is consequently no record of how the voyagers spent their time. It is enough to say that even Marcia herself never once touched brush or pencil, that Markby found smoking a trouble, and that even Harrison, although all his hours were leisure, never once cleaned so much as a fowling-piece that did not actually require the operation. And for Marcia, indeed, there was a practical excuse, for the South Sea Islands altogether defy the painter's skill. Their peculiar charm cannot be transferred to canvas. The colouring in fact is dull; the charm is somehow in the air. It is as subtle as a perfume which you can only describe in words by comparing it to another which it closely resembles. Read the song of the sailors of Ulysses in Tennyson's "Lotos Eaters." These sea-beaten veterans

—" sat them down upon the yellow sand,
Betwixt the sun and moon, upon the shore."

Beyond this they did nothing except to register a solemn vow that they would never leave the place.

" Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow lotos-land to live and lie reclined,
Like the gods beside their nectar careless of mankind."

The days melted into weeks, and perhaps the weeks might have melted into months, had there not been practical reasons for departure. A man in this world, whether prosperous as Norwich, or philosophically poor as Markby, cannot wholly neglect his affairs, and to put it roughly, you must treat the South Sea Islands as you treat other places. You must do them, and then get back again to your ordinary life. Probably not even

Epicurus himself would have elected to remain in them for ever, but I am sorry for those (including myself) who have never visited them once. As for the man who has been to them once, and refuses the chance of going a second time, he is simply what the greatest philosopher of the world would have termed "*ἀναίσδητός τις*,"—as devoid of capability of enjoyment as is a skittle-pin or a milestone.

"Besides," said Norwich, "we can come back again whenever we please. Next year, if you like, Marcia, unless you would prefer the Kara Seas, where we can harpoon walrus, bump icebergs, and enjoy a sun which never sets for half the year, and during that half gives no heat."

So anchor was up, sail set to economise coal, and once again the engines began their ceaseless motion with its monotonous and yet pleasant refrain.

The middle of June found them at Cowes, where the *Cecilia* was left to be overhauled. A couple of days were spent in London, where the Academy had to be seen, and where Patti was singing. But London even at its best is a sorry contrast to places such as those they had left. It was a relief to find themselves (so at least said Markby, while the Fräulein judicially concurred) in the train (a special one for the occasion), hurrying past station after station, through our beautiful English country, until at last they stopped, with infinite grinding of wheels and flashing of sparks from the metals, at the little roadside station in Northumberland which is nearest to Rothbury Park.

They had been expected, of course, for the village was *en fête*. I suppose the steward must have received a message through some bird in the air. The station-master, an ex-sergeant of Guards, had attired himself in full uniform for the occasion. The tenantry were in force, and so were the school-children, and there was a general

muster of local families who had heard of the arrival and of the romance that had preceded, and had driven over; and the bells were ringing, and everything was as bright as sunshine and happy faces can make things in this world.

Better still, there was no further demonstration—no feeding, no addresses, no organised formalities of any kind. *Surtout point de gêne*, if I may thus adapt Talleyrand's famous *surtout point de zèle*.

It was a small and happy party that evening. The dining-room was for the time a hothouse of flowers, blazing with wax tapers. The butler wore his most episcopal air, and uncorked the champagne with a solemnity that might almost have frozen it had that operation been needed, and the heads of the footmen glistened like the peaks of the Alps.

Dinner over, they adjourned to the billiard-room, where, as Marcia declined to join in pool, Norwich and Markby amused themselves with the orthodox English "fifty up," and what the amiable author of the "Art of Dining" would have termed its "essential concomitants," cigars and brandy and soda.

And here let me say once and for all, that if my reader considers I tell him too much as to what my characters eat and drink, I would plead in bar the priceless maxim of Brillat Savarin—"Tell me what a man eats, and I will tell you what he is."

When at last Markby and Norwich were alone together the former produced a copy of a London daily paper, which had come to him with other letters to his Club, enclosed in an envelope instead of a wrapper, and specially marked and noted.

Duel at Cannes.

"A duel took place yesterday at this fashionable resort, resulting from a quarrel which occurred at the English

Club between Lord Henry Forrester and Captain Markby, late of the 999th Regiment. The aggressor was Captain Markby, who grossly insulted Lord Henry in the smoking-room of the Club, but the Captain is said to have stated that he was prepared to justify his conduct, and had acted deliberately. The encounter took place a few miles out of the town, and only one shot was exchanged, with the result that Lord Henry fell dead on the spot, while his antagonist was not even wounded. The affair caused naturally the most intense excitement, which has not yet subsided. The deceased nobleman, who is the second brother of the Duke of Worcester, was in the diplomatic service, and was married to Berthe, elder daughter of the late Comte de Beauregard, but leaves no issue. He was a Deputy Lieutenant for Worcestershire, Colonel of the Worcestershire Militia, formerly represented that county in Parliament, and was an elder brother of Trinity House. He was an enthusiastic yachtsman, and his terrible and premature death will be deeply lamented by a large circle of friends, to whom his many virtues and brilliant talents had long endeared him. His remains are being embalmed, and will be brought to England for interment in the family mausoleum."

I dare say that this paragraph is about as veracious as are a good many others of a similar kind. For in thus taking leave of Lord Henry Forrester, I may again remark that he was a strange mixture of good and evil—generous, capable of strong affection, and yet extremely selfish, heartless, and, as far as his relations with his wife went, utterly base. What is commonly termed his honour had never any more been questioned than his personal courage, and I am sure that many men and not a few women regretted his death, and even when they knew the worst, could still feel it in their hearts to speak kindly of him as of an unfortunate man, who perhaps had held bad cards, or perhaps mismanaged such cards as he had held.

He had often acted in the vilest manner. Still, as generally happens in this world, he had met with his punishment here.

R. I. P.

I cannot find it in my heart to wish him less. And I may perhaps say of him, that nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it.

CHAPTER XXXIX

It is the April of the year after the events recorded in the last chapter—an English April, with pleasant promise of May, and under the verandah of a villa at Bournemouth, looking down over the pine-clad cliffs upon the sea, are seated a small and happy party. The day is still young, and the blue channel is leaping and laughing in the light, while the air is heavy with the rich balsamy odour of the pine groves. There are wickerwork lounges and chairs round the little table which bears the simple and pleasant afternoon tea. Norwich is unencumbered except by a telescope, which he is not using. Markby in the pocket of his shooting-jacket has what looks like a chart in its case. The Fräulein, it need hardly be said, is knitting. Marcia, with the indescribably happy look of a young matron, is doing nothing beyond dreamily watching the vessels as they pass up and down.

The silence is broken by the sharp, shrill cry of a gull hovering on poised pinions overhead. This is followed by a second cry equally inarticulate, but more intelligible, from the really most important member of the group, an infant hidden in the arms of a round-faced, sunburnt, smiling Alsatian nurse, hidden herself in an immense cap profusely decorated with blue ribbons, as befits the dignity of her position.

"He is asking for his mamma," says the nurse, and little Lord Rothbury lustily squalls his concurrence.

The child, handed to Marcia, stints its wailing. Marcia bends over it, croons to it, and watches it staring at her rings with great round eyes, grappling at them with its

plump fingers, and strenuously fighting to convey them to its mouth. Markby and Norwich rise.

"We will stroll down to the pier," says the latter to his wife, "have a cigar, and throw our eyes once again over the yacht. I think everything is right on board her, but, as Markby is always telling me, 'the master's eye is the best mop of all.'"

So the two men wander down along the edge of the cliff to the pier, where the long-boat is waiting with the ubiquitous Harrison in her stern sheets, and a few long strokes bring them to the companion. From cut-water to rudder-post the *Cecilia* is like a lady's boudoir, for her owner takes a pride in his vessel; and I agree with old sailors, that a vessel is like a horse, and not only understands kind and generous treatment, but responds to it.

Having finished their round of inspection, they lean against the bulwarks, and watch the already purpling lines of the horizon.

"So it's up anchor to-morrow," said Markby.

"Yes," answers Norwich laughingly. "Down channel first, and then past the wicked old Lizard, for anywhere that our fancy or our fates may determine. My wife likes the sea, and I am never at my happiest, or perhaps I ought to say my most comfortable, ashore. We have literally the world before us. Why should we trouble to mark out our course on the chart? Rothbury is not cargo consigned to any given port."

"To tell you the truth, Norwich, I am getting tired of doing nothing, and I want a stroke of work. I shall rot in this happy laziness, like the *Cecilia* herself would rot at her moorings. I have been in the scabbard too long, and I want to be pulled out again."

"You're a most uncomfortable companion," says the other. "I shall answer you as the boatswain answered the mutineer. Down came the rope on his shoulders, and the vagabond howled; down on his loins, and he howled

again; down on the broad of his back, and he howled louder still. 'Plague on the fellow,' cried the boatswain, 'wherever I hit him, there's no pleasing him.' What is it you want, Xavier?''

"Something to do, my dear fellow. I think when we return I shall try to fix myself up somewhere as secretary to a Club. I want to be like the honest centurion, with my day's work cut out. Go down to the Foreign Office and get me made Deputy Vice-Consul somewhere on the Gold Coast or in the West Indies. Never mind Yellow Jack. Like the great Hannibal Chollop, 'I am fever-proof, likewise ague.'''

"I'll get you something better than that when we come back," says Norwich; "or if you like, you shall have the refusal of it to-night. I knew what you wanted, and I've got the billet for you in my pocket—in fact, a letter from the authorities themselves, only you'll turn up your nose at it. The work won't suit you."

"Won't it? Any work will suit me—any work that I'm fit for, and can undertake."

"If you don't prove fit for it," said Norwich, "you will get the sack. But I think you're up to it. Marcia wants all my time to herself. She is most exacting, you know. Consequently I want all the time of somebody else. Look after my affairs for me, Markby. I don't ask you to go round and collect rents, and be peppered with buck-shot from behind a hedge. Just go about with your eye open, and see I am not robbed beyond a fair and reasonable extent. Take stock of things, and keep me posted up as to how I stand. Consider yourself Rothbury's trustee, and be as stern and strict and economical as you please. There'll be lots of work for you, and we shall be company for one another. Besides, I am always a fool, and can never think of the right thing. I am sure this is the right thing, because it's Marcia's idea and not mine. If you say no to me, you will only have to say yes to her."

Markby for a moment was puzzled, as most men are always puzzled by a clever woman's tact. If Norwich had offered to "start him" somehow, as the phrase is, there would have been a dozen good answers at once. To the present proposal no objections could possibly be urged. He was asked to undertake work for which it was impossible to plead that he was unfit. It was work a gentleman could do—work at the prospect of which many gentlemen of the best family would jump. Nor would it lay him under any obligation. It was not an offer at all in the nature of a present. On the contrary, it came in friendship no doubt of the strongest kind, but none the less as a *bonâ fide* business proposal.

"It is exactly like her to have thought of it," he said; "and it will keep us together, which I shall like. We'll give it a trial, Norwich, and see how it works. Let's hope it will work well."

So the matter was thus settled, and they were rowed ashore.

"It's all right, my dear," cried out Norwich bursting into the room where Marcia was sitting in her lounge with the everlasting hope of the family in her arms. "It's all right. He's promised to come and stop, of course, like the dear old fellow he is, and next year we'll do big game somewhere."

"I am very happy indeed, Captain Markby," says Marcia, holding out her hand. "It would never have done for you to leave us. My husband would have found life intolerable without you; and I, too, have my own bit of news."

"And pray what may that be?" asks her husband.

"The Fräulein," says Marcia, "intends to stop until Rothbury can read and write and be a good boy. The last contingency is so remote and indefinite that I think we have got her for good and all."

And the Fräulein looks through her blue spectacles over

her knitting-needles, and nods her head in an emphatic manner.

There had been many pleasant evenings of late but none so quietly happy as this. When Rothbury had been sent off they played bridge for penny points, until Norwich, who was in partnership with the Fräulein, secured the third rubber after a desperate fight for the odd trick.

"I'm always in luck," he says as he rises from the table. "I am even lucky at cards. I am bound, I suppose, to break proverbs."

"Better break proverbs than break your arm," observes Marcia.

"To-night, at any rate," says Markby, "as we weigh anchor at noon to-morrow."

At noon next day, by the vessel's chronometer, the anchor was weighed, catted, and fished in the most approved style. "Easy ahead" was given, and then in less than a minute, "Full steam ahead," and away the lovely craft glided through the water, tossing the foam from her bows, and leaving behind her a long widening wake.

Who does not know the joyous feeling of off at last? Off they were in earnest, with a smooth sea under them and a bright, clear sky overhead—off wherever they might please, with no need for the present, at any rate, to trouble further than to keep their course down channel and a good look-out.

"We will settle our plans," said Norwich, "when we have passed the Lizard."

It was a glorious night, one of those nights of our own southern Spring that bring with them more than the promise of summer. In the clear sky overhead the stars hung like cressets in a "golden galaxy." Here and there they passed some steamer inward bound, or overhauled one labouring her way out. But for the pulse of the engines, there was perfect silence.

"Life is almost too happy," says Marcia.

Norwich can only nod his assent. He for his part was too happy himself at that moment for definite speech.

"Do you read your Goethe, Miss Dietz?" asks Markby.

"Of course I do," retorts the Fräulein with mock indignation.

"Then," says Markby, "what does your great teacher say? 'The tree of theory is dead. The tree of life is young for ever.' And," he adds emphatically, "it is a devilish good sentiment, even out of the mouth in which it is stuck. Look, all of you: I never saw the evening stars so bright."

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